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THE PAPAL VISIT: A THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

THE PRESS ON THE POPE'S VISIT TO INDIA

*Benny Aguiar*

PLANNING OF THE PAPAL VISIT TO INDIA:  
SOME CRITICAL ASPECTS

*G. Kaniarakath*

THE VISIT OF THE POPE - SOME COMMENTS

*K. C. Abraham*

INCULTURATION AND THE LITURGIES DURING  
THE PAPAL VISIT: AN ASSESSMENT

*Gerwin van Leeuwen*

PAPAL VISIT TO INDIA AND THE CALL TO UNITY

*Kuncheria Pathil*

SPEECHES OF JOHN PAUL II IN INDIA:  
A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

*Mathias Mundaden*

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# **JEEVADHARA**

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**JEEVADHARA**

# **The People of God**

**THE PAPAL VISIT: A THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

Editor:

**KUNCHERIA PATHIL**

Jeevadhara

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## CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	253
The Press on the Pope's Visit to India <i>Benny Aguiar</i>	255
Planning of the Papal Visit to India: some critical aspects <i>G. Kaniarakath</i>	265
The Visit of the Pope - some comments <i>K. C. Abraham</i>	272
Inculturation and the Liturgies during the Papal Visit: an assessment <i>Gerwin van Leeuwen</i>	276
Speeches of John Paul II in India: a theological analysis <i>Mathias Mundaden</i>	288
The Papal Visit to India and Call to Unity <i>Kuncheria Pathil</i>	320



## Editorial

The visit of Pope John Paul II to India was a unique event in the history of the church in India. The importance given to it by the Indian Government, the wide publicity and coverage given by the international and national press, the long and meticulous preparations made by the Catholic church in India, the ecumenical and warm welcome given to the Pope by millions of Indian People, all these indicated the importance of the event. Thousands of pages were written and published on this event, on the person of the Pope and on the Catholic church today that one who wants to make an assessment of the event will have a very hard job. The editors of *Jeevadhara* had decided to publish a theological assessment of the Papal visit, but it had to be delayed as it suited only to the Ecclesiology Number of July.

The Pope visited India not so much as the head of the Vatican State, but as the spiritual leader of 800 million catholics. He came as a pastor to meet his flock. Could he really meet the flock? Could the shepherd call the sheep by name? Could he bind and heal the wounds of the flock, lead the flock to fresh pastures and flowing waters? It is complained that the shepherd was skilfully separated from the flock so that he could not directly and personally see their poverty, misery and oppression. It seemed that the papal visit was an affair of the hierarchy where the People of God had no real and responsible participation. Not merely lakhs but crores of ruppees was lavishly spent without any accountability to the people. Whose money? Who spent it? Every Bishop and every region had their own petty interests and the Holy Father was the casualty! Did the Papal visit and the Pope's call to unity really unify the church? Or did it inflict new wounds? The programmes of the Papal visit were controlled by the powerful lobbies at the CBCI and at Vatican. It is complained that CRI and the entire religious communities of India were eclipsed at the Papal visit. It is

criticized that all the major meetings with the flock — with the clergy, the religious, the youth and the seminarians — took place in the North, in and around Bombay. Where in India are the flock at large? Why didn't the Pope make a visit to one of the Syro-Malabar missions in north India? Or, why couldn't the Papal programmes include a visit to Mannanam, the centre of the CMI congregation, the first and largest indigenous religious community in India whose founder was beatified at Kottayam? True, even if an angel from heaven were to organize such a papal visit, criticisms could be made, complaints would be heard! But that does not mean that the criticisms should not be taken seriously. We have to learn from our failures and mistakes.

In this number George Kaniarakath was asked to write the "inside story" of the papal visit. But he could not fully succeed as the Roman Curia was so impregnable and secretive. Benny Aguiar makes a limited survey of the press reports both national and international. K.C. Abraham offers some reflections and comments from the side of non-catholic churches. Gerwin Van Leeuwen discusses the topic of inculturation and the papal liturgies. He pointedly asks the question: "Is it not strange that we are anxious to show our 'Indian' identity to outsiders (foreign visitors) while we shun that identity in our daily life?" The present editor writes on the general theme of the papal visit, "The call of the Lord to Unity". All the papal homilies and addresses are analysed under various themes by Mathias Mundaden. I regret that it could not be published in its entirety. The editor is very grateful to the contributors for their co-operation and prompt service.

This assessment is not a final verdict on the papal visit. Our intention is just to make people reflect independently and responsibly on this ecclesial event.



## The Press on the Pope's Visit to India\*

When I met Wilton Wynn, *Time* Correspondent in Rome, during the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, he told me that India was going to have the biggest religious news story of 1986 — the visit of the Pope. When I asked him if he would be there in the Pope's entourage to cover the event he said no, as he already had been on several such visits before. Yet when the event took place, *Time's* coverage of the Pope's visit was singularly lacklustre and unenthusiastic, concentrating on the anti-pope demonstrations in Delhi, the small crowds that turned up there and in other places of the North and on the refusal of many Hindu religious leaders to attend the Inter-Faith meeting in Madras on the grounds that they wanted not only to listen to the Pope but also to talk to him. *Time's* tepid treatment of the Pope's visit may partly be explained by the fact that its correspondents had to submit their copy several days before the Pope's tour ended and therefore could not report on the enormous crowds ranging from a half to one million that thronged to see the Pope in Madras and Kerala. But its handling of the papal visit was not untypical of the Western Press and electronic media which concentrated on the poverty of the Indian slums rather than on the immense fervour with which India greeted the Pope.

But that the Papal visit to India was the top religious news story of 1986 was evidenced by the many curtain

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\* The article makes a brief survey of the reports by the Indian Press. The author confines himself mainly to the Press in Bombay. The South Indian Press had wider coverage of the Papal visit. (Editor)

raisers published here and abroad. They attempted to size up the state of the Church in India and tried to forecast what the Pope would say. Writing in two articles in the widely circulated *Our Sunday Visitor* in America, Desmond O'Grady who had visited the country in 1985 said that the Pope would find a comparatively peaceful church, some Indian Catholics even going so far as to say that the Pope took so long to visit because he considered the Church there trouble-free. However O'Grady went on to say that more critical Indian Catholics claim that it is *not* trouble-free, but gives that impression because of lacklustre internal leadership.

The main problems facing the Church, O'Grady noted, were inculturation (how far the church should go in adopting customs and practices tied up with another religion) and tension in the Church in India over work for social justice and also over evangelisation methods. Regarding evangelisation, some missionaries wanted to concentrate on development rather than conversion. O'Grady noted that priests and nuns had taken a leading part in the struggle to protect Kerala fishermen against the inroads of mechanised trawlers, though some critics feared Marxist contamination of the Christian message. According to some of the people O'Grady interviewed, the problems they would like to see the Pope tackle during his visit were the demographic issue and liberation theology in the Indian context. Other tensions which the Pope may attempt to heal were the dispute between the Latin Bishops and Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches which claimed jurisdiction in Latin territory.

The London *Tablet* in its scene-setter highlighted the crucial issues on which the Pope's guidance was awaited. Calling it a particularly delicate pilgrimage, the *Tablet's* writer, Kieran Gregory, noted that Hindus had protested against the Papal visit because if he was a religious leader, he should not be received by the head of state and if he came as head of state he should not be allowed to proselytise by performing religious functions.



The Pope, said Kieran Gregory, would undoubtedly endorse Indian democracy and secularism which is to the advantage of the Catholic Church. Referring to inculturation, the *Tablet* noted that Christianity will not be rooted in India until it takes to itself the rich spiritual heritage already found, Christianity being its fulfilment in the manner in which it was the fulfilment of the Old Testament. It also noted the impatience of many religious with long established institutions such as schools and hospitals which they claim are serving the rich. It further noted that religious felt that the bishops did not back them up in their campaign for the Western Coast fishermen threatened by the mechanised trawlers. The second issue was the relationship between the different rites in India. The *Tablet* referred to the speeches of the Syro-Malabar and Malankara bishops during the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in which they described the principle of one territory and jurisdiction as unjust and against the teaching of the Vatican Council on Oriental Churches. The Pope was likely to confront the matter during the last days of his visit in Kerala.

In contrast the press in India was fully seized of the importance of the Pope's visit. Long before the Pope's visit, snippets of information and short sketches of the life of John Paul began appearing in the daily newspapers and in the magazines. Almost every newspaper of repute had its curtain-raiser or scene-setter on the eve of the Pope's coming.

Not all of the publicity was complimentary to the Church or the Pope. The Hindi Press, which our papal visit media committees completely neglected, was flagrantly hostile. The Anand Bazar Patrika-linked *Ravivar* published in Calcutta, displayed a cover picture of the Pope with the title 'Khatare Ki Ghanta Hai, Pope Ki Yatra' (The Pope's tour is an alarm signal). Inside were twenty four pages of virulent anti-Christian propaganda. Why should the Pope be allowed state facilities, asked *Ravivar*, when none of our religious leaders, when they travel abroad, are given such facilities. *Ravivar* attacked the government for in-

viting the Pope. 22 out of Ravivar's 82 pages were devoted to telling its numerous readers that Christian missionaries were out to break up the country, that missionaries were spreading hatred in Chotanagpur, that Christian work for development and social justice was meant only to exploit the poverty of the country for their own ends. The history of the Papacy was described as being a bloody one and the Vatican Bank Scandal was exposed. Christians in India were described as relics of colonialism and therefore not truly Indian. Ravivar and other Hindi papers were of course following the propaganda line of the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Arya Samaj which had held rallies in Delhi and elsewhere, stating that thousands of conversions would be performed by the Pope and threatening a mass agitation against the Pope when he arrived in Delhi or other places like Ranchi. Doubtless it was because of such hostility that the government of India was somewhat restrained in its welcome to the Pope as well as in the coverage it gave to the Pope's visit in Doordarshan.

Another bitter attack on the Church came from the left in the *Times of India* of 2 January 1986. Under the seemingly innocuous headline "Setting Right Ties with Vatican", the writer described the Church in India as subservient to a foreign power, the Vatican. Nikhil Chakravarty delivered a verdict on the history of the Church as 'unsavoury' and went on to prove this sweeping generalisation by mentioning "the close ties with Fascists in Italy", "the burnings at the stake", the "index of prohibited books" and "the support of the European powers in their imperial campaign of conquest". Asserting that the Vatican is "in reality aligned" with the West and that "India cannot afford to be oblivious of this background of the Roman Catholic Church", he called for a sweeping away of "the practices of Indo-Vatican relationship which are a relic of the colonial past". In particular, he asked that India should insist on government being notified about its intention to appoint a particular priest as bishop. He also charged that "large amounts of money are transferred legally and illegally by foreign powers to various religious organisations including



the Roman Catholic Church" and that "this practice needs to be curbed". More importantly he asked that the "hundreds of foreign priests" still in India be returned home, since Indian Catholic priests are fully capable of coping with our spiritual needs".

A riposte sent by this writer was published by the *Times of India* and a few days later G.K. Reddy reported in *The Hindu* that the Government of India did not intend to raise the question of "pre-notification" during the Pope's visit though it "agrees with the view of the critics that it is necessary to regulate this papal authority through a proper agreement on pre-notification as so many other countries have with the Vatican". Reddy's report also said that the Government of India was steering clear of involvement in the controversy over the Vatican's opposition to the Theology of Liberation in Latin America. Reddy's report said that there would be no state ceremonial or state dinners for the Pope, and he would be allowed to concentrate on religious aspects.

In sharp contrast to *Ravivar* and Chakravarty's article was the Jan. 25-Feb. 7 issue of *Frontline*, produced by the publishers of *The Hindu* which had a colour picture of the Pope on its cover and the title 'A Powerful Pope' inside. Mr. Thomas Abraham, a Mar Thomite and former Indian Ambassador to the Holy See gave a masterly summary of the history of the Papacy, a statistical survey of the Church, a description of the Church's administration and government and a short sketch of the life of the Pope. Abraham noted that the existence of the tiny Vatican State was the guarantee of the absolute independence of its world-wide mission and stated that he himself had asked the Vatican to send an observer to the non-aligned meeting in Delhi and the Vatican had agreed since it wanted to keep abreast of developments in the non-aligned world. Regarding Liberation Theology Abraham stated that the Pope was alleged to be close to right-wing ultra-conservative groups in the Church like *Opus Dei* and the Church seemed to be moving towards a more centralised degree of control from Rome.



However, Abraham said that these criticisms of the Pope have only limited interest in India because Roman Catholics are few in numbers and most of them take little interest in doctrinal nuances. "The one area in India where the attitude of the Roman Church to the theory of liberation will be studied with interest is Kerala which has nuns like Sister Alice and priests like Fr. Kappen." The Pope was coming to India because the invitation was a long-standing one and India was an important country. The Pope was not coming to convert anybody to Roman Catholicism. "The mistake lies in thinking that the Roman Catholics still emphasise conversions." Abraham stated that the days in which Christians set up hospitals and educational institutions in India seem to be over and wondered whether the Church would be moving into a purely spiritual and pastoral role or in some new direction.

Among the other curtain-raisers, Ayesha Kagal's in the Sunday Review of the *Times of India* was an important and perceptive one. It first painted a portrait of John Paul II. The Pope, she said, restores elemental things, embodies moral conviction. He has emerged as a spokesman for peace, for poverty and for human rights. In an anxious age, where material progress has only deepened the uncertainty of life, he exemplifies certitude. Kagal then goes on to present a panoramic view of the state of the Church deeply divided in almost every country between progressives and conservatives. "The 80's therefore", says Kagal, "have been a period of profound struggle within the Catholic Church as it strives to define a direction for itself". About the Church in India, especially Western India she quotes a priest telling her: "It has been a ghetto church, an inward looking one with a conservative clergy. As for the laity, the Church here has never been of the poor. It is a middle class church, caught up in the rat-race like everyone else". Liberation theology, the priest said, must be rethought in terms of the Indian situation. The crucial issue was dialogue with other religions.

In the *Hindustan Times* Sunday Magazine K. Venkat Narayan said Bala saheb Deoras had not done his home-

work when he charged that the Pope's visit posed a threat to Hinduism. He had not taken the trouble to check the latest census figures which say that Christians increased in the previous decade by only 16 per cent whereas Muslims increased by 30 per cent, Hindus by 24 per cent and Sikhs by 26 per cent. The educational and medical work done by Christians needs to be acknowledged, he said. In the same issue, M. N. Jacob M.P. said Christians have been in the forefront of the social, economic and political life of the nation.

Still another curtain-raiser was by Ajith Pillai in the *Sunday Observer*. While for the lay believer, said Pillai, the Pope's visit would mean a spiritual awakening, "a recharging of batteries", more serious-minded observers will be waiting to hear the Pope's views on such issues as the Indianisation of the Church, the question of Liberation Theology and the call for a dialogue with other religious communities. One person whom Pillai interviewed told him that there were few issues as such within the Church, except for the rites question. The Church in India was stagnant.

In an article in the *Times of India*, Allwyn Fernandes said that proof that the Church in India had changed much since Vatican II was that priests and laymen alike were questioning the expenditure on the Pope's visit. These winds of change have not percolated from the top, said Allwyn Fernandes, but have spread due to the ferment among the clergy and perceptive laymen. Questions are being constantly asked whether the existing work of the Church does not perpetuate social inequality and injustice.

In another article in the *Hindustan Times*, P. Tharyan said that though the Church has changed, it has not changed fast enough and asked why it is hesitant to spearhead socio-economic movements for the benefit of humankind. The Vatican should understand the realities in every country.

Another paper that published a series of articles in preparation for the Pope's visit was the *Calcutta Telegraph*.

One article was about the origin of Christianity in India. In another article Horace Rozario S.J. said that at synods in Rome "the Indian bishops decidedly play second fiddle to their Western colleagues". He went on to describe the diversity among the Catholics of India and rated the average Indian Catholic a docile child of the Church who is taken for granted as a child by church leaders. The Telegraph also published an extremely critical article on Pope John Paul II by Claude Alvares. Alvares said the Pope was responsible for a new trend in the life of the Church which seeks to return it not just to a pre-Vatican II period but to a more archaic and baroque environment. John Paul II, said he, is firm on all the wrong things. He is steadily heading the Church in a direction which could prove thoroughly disastrous for its future in the modern world. Referring to the beatification of Sister Alphonsa whom he called an a-social nun, he said that was the only appropriate thing left for him to do. "Otherwise his visit to India seems quite pointless." Alvares's article drew a riposte from Coadjutor Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Calcutta, who said Alvares's article was out of tune and not factual. As the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops made it clear, there is no indication of any desire to put the clock back in church reforms. Archbishop D'Souza also pointed out that John Paul has a concern for people and is opposed to all exploitation of man by man. It is not for the Pope to follow the majority opinion or to be led by public pressure. He must proclaim the truth as it has been received from Christ.

Another good scene-setter appeared in the *Indian Express* on the eve of the Pope's visit. Entitled 'Cracks in the Monolith', it analysed issues that were dividing the Church, such as conversion and development, liberation theology, women's place in the Church, the role of the laity, indigenisation, scheduled caste Christians and caste in the Church. However all this does not mean that the Church is breaking up. "Quite the contrary. All the ferment in the Catholic Church is a sign that it is alive. Sticking to the old text book answers will fossilise the Church, which is worse than weakening it because then the Church would not be alive."



In the *Sunday Observer* of 23-2-86 there was a very good discussion of the rites question and of inculturation by Dhiren Bhagat. Vatican II, he said, is definitely on the side of the Syro-Malabar and Malankara churches, but history, he feared, may be on the Latin side. On Inculturation, Bhagat said, the hope is that it will not remain a mere missionary strategy, but that it will ultimately serve to transform the Church itself, to rid the People of God of the Eurocentrism they have been heir to.

Though the curtain raisers and numerous other articles published in India in preparation for the Pope's visit were thus not all of them laudatory and uncritical, yet it must be said to the credit of the Indian press that it went all out to give adequate and full coverage to that visit. *India Today* gave seven pages of the most beautiful colour pictures of the Pope's visit. "The fact that no other Pope had visited India on an official invitation imbued the Indian Catholic Church with a new sense of fulfilment and pride." *India Today* gave a more accurate figure of the crowds that turned up to greet the Pope. About 8 lakh people, it said, witnessed the beatification of Father Chavara and Sister Alphonsa in Kottayam. Sumit Mitra summed up the visit as "a sure entry in India's episcopal history and a benchmark in Catholic annals. For the country as a whole, and its tapestry of composite culture, the ten days in February provided a rare glimpse of the man at the helm of the Holy See".

Finally both before and after the Pope's visit, several newspapers devoted editorials to it. The *Indian Express* evaluated the significance of some of his remarks. The Pope's acknowledgement of India's age-old "sense of the sacred", said the *Express*, "removed any lingering resentment over the failure in the past of spokesmen of the Church to appreciate "the truths in India's religious traditions", as he put it and its rich culture... The Pope spoke of the pluralism of faiths and called for an inter-religious dialogue to build a better world..." The *Express* said that apprehensions that the Pope was coming to make converts were totally unfounded and the protest demonst-

rations paled into insignificance before the effusive welcome he received everywhere from everybody. Regarding the Pope's statement that Family Planning should be propagated only by natural and not artificial means, the *Express* said: "This is a view with which neither the Government nor most people in this country will agree. The runaway increase in population has aggravated poverty, hunger and human indignity in many parts of the world and curbing fertility without resort to coercive or other objectionable means cannot be tabooed." Finally the paper said the role of the Pope as father of the Catholic Church should have been clearly demarcated from his being a distinguished world figure-cum-head of state.

The *Free Press Journal* said the Pope's odyssey belied the banter that he is the "white man's pope" and the fears of the Jeremiahs that his visit would lead to a wave of religious conversions. Nowhere did the Pope even remotely speak of proselytisation or conversion. He spoke of moral poverty (of broken homes and separated families) and of reconciliation. He asked people to "let those who have no voice finally speak, let India speak and let Mother Teresa's poor and all the poor of the world speak".

Benny Aguiar

# **Planning of the Papal Visit to India: Some Critical Aspects**

It was not without some hesitation that I accepted the invitation of the editor to evaluate the preparation at various levels of the recent visit of Pope John Paul II. The Pope wanted to visit India which is unique in many ways with its millennial history of inter-mingling of cultures and religions as well as linguistic and ethnic diversities which have all formed a unity in diversity. Hence the preparations naturally demanded careful and strenuous efforts at taking account of the multi-religious and even multi-ecclesial ecumenical situation of India. In this essay, conceding that those who prepared for the great event are to be gratefully remembered, our main objective is to point out a few facts which had to be given more attention in planning the papal programmes. It is not in the least our intention to find fault with anybody, but only to highlight areas where improvements were possible and necessary.

## **The Initiative**

Naturally, the idea of inviting the Pope to visit India came from the Catholic Bishops' Conference here (CBCI) which is a conference of bishops from the Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches. After speaking to the Pope privately and knowing his mind, the representatives of the CBCI requested the government of India to make a formal and official invitation to the Pope. The CBCI too made such an invitation. Mention of some important special occasion was made to the Pope in the first briefing to find an opportune date. The original idea seemed to have been to celebrate the Centenary of the establish-



ment of the Latin hierarchy which happened in 1886. But it was formulated as the Centenary of the establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy of India<sup>1</sup> to the great astonishment and dissent of the oriental Bishops. 1886 actually marks certain painful events in the history of the ancient St. Thomas Christians in India. About this Fr. Placid J. Podipara who was professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome wrote:

In 1886 the Latin Indian Hierarchy under the Propaganda was erected. Verapoly became an Archdiocese with Quilon as its suffragan. Cranganore was suppressed, its title (ad honorem) being reserved for the Portuguese prelates. The Portuguese Archbishop of Goa (Primate of the East) was made Patriarch of the East Indies — the former ALL INDIA of the Thomas Christians<sup>2</sup>.

Anyhow, reason prevailed and the purpose of the papal visit to India was described as pastoral.

### **Involvement of the Roman Curia**

As the only Indian Cardinal in the Roman Curia, Simon cardinal Lourdasamy had an important role to play in deciding the programmes and speeches of the Pope, though the sum and substance of the speeches are from the Pope himself. Naturally, Augustino Cardinal Casaroli, Secretary of State of the Vatican, Joseph Cardinal Tongo, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Archbishop Augustino Cacciavilan, Pro-Nuncio to India were involved. Fr. Robert Tucci, S.J. of the Vatican Radio who has prepared different papal journeys, had a decisive role in finalising the programmes, of course, in consultation with the CBCI leaders, the pro-Nuncio and the bishops concerned.

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1. *The Deepika*, April 27 and 28, May 4, 1985  
*The Examiner*, May 11, 1985

2. Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, Darton and Todd, London and St. Paul's Publications, Ecmkay, 1970, p. 194

## The India that was to welcome the Pope

### 1. Political and inter-religious situation

Any event has to be seen and interpreted in the socio-cultural and religious contexts of the people of the place especially when it happens in a country like India which offers such a diversity and multiplicity of languages, cultures, customs, religions and ecclesial traditions. When it is the visit of the Pope the political implications too have to be taken into account as he is also the head of a State, though the smallest in the world.

At no time was the political situation of India so uncertain and perturbed as when Rajiv Gandhi took up the leadership of the nation. There were problems in Punjab, Assam and even in some other states with repercussions also in other parts of the country as well as the world. It was to such an India that Pope John Paul II, the religious head of 850 million Catholics and the head of a State was to be welcomed. But India extended the invitation and the Pope accepted it. The Inter-Religious situation in India was perhaps another more serious factor to be considered earnestly. Hinduism, the religion of the vast majority of Indians, is known for its internal pluriformity and external tolerance as also for its capacity to absorb and assimilate whatever is found good in other traditions. It does not impose uniformity of creed or worship. Lord Krishna says: "However men approach me, even so do I accept them, for, on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine."<sup>3</sup> That the one and the same reality is spoken of by sages in different ways is an accepted axiom of Hindu religion.

Already in the fifth century Buddhism and Jainism broke away from Hinduism. Judaism probably reached India at the time of king Solomon. Christianity was brought to India by St. Thomas, an apostle of Christ. Islam established itself by the twelfth century. Hindu India has learned to live in peace in such religious and cultural pluralism. All religious leaders are sacred persons for Hinduism. One

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3. Bhagvad-Geetha iv, 11

like the Pope is a *Jagad Guru* (a world teacher), a *Jeevan-muktha* (a living saint) and was to be welcomed as such.

The Hindu brethren see all religions leading to the Absolute Reality and consequently conversion is a simple cultural alienation and nothing else. Also the massive institutions and the westernized communities created by the foreign missionaries have presented an adverse situation in India. Go to any of the big cities especially in the North and see the christian communities there: one would be struck by people who dress themselves and speak and behave as foreigners; even their names are foreign. This western character was manifested even in a dance programme presented before the Pope who should have been very much surprised at such a spectacle in India.

One has to understand the few protests and demonstrations in some parts of India in the above context<sup>4</sup>. Anyhow, Vatican and the Pope were aware of the problem and in his gestures and speeches the Pope stressed the need for inter-religious dialogue and co-operation. That he knelt before the tomb of Mahatma Gandhi should have touched the hearts of millions in India and abroad. Did he not see and recognise in Gandhi a real *Mahatma*, a saint at least in his personal vision?

## 2. Ecclesial situation

From the Christian and Catholic point of view the papal visit was above all pastoral; the Pope came to meet his people, to console and encourage them as also to share their joys and sorrows for a few days. The Pope himself described the journey as a 'pilgrimage of peace'. The very theme selected for the papal visit, 'Unity in the Lord' seemed to point to the actual need of the

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4. This created some security panic among the organisers so that the religious ceremonies of the Pope were held at a distance from the people. The local press-men had many restrictions. The Catholic daily *Deepika* which inaugurated its centenary with the lighting of a lamp by the Pope could not take a picture of it. And the *Osservatore Romano* which was to do it failed to take one!



Church. Already since a few years the oriental Catholic bishops were expressing their grief that they were not able to take care of their own people simply because the latter happen to be in Latin territories. This has been strongly voiced by all the three oriental Metropolitan Archbishops at the recent Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome as well as by all the oriental bishops when they met the Pope officially on their *ad Limina* visit to Rome thereafter.

As it often happens, attention was given to the regional and linguistic aspects of the papal visit, which may even be disputed, whereas no attention at all was given to the ecclesial diversity that exists in India, which is beyond all dispute. This had to be taken more seriously for the obvious reason that the CBCI at that time had only a 'compromise leadership' to say the least. It is also to be noted that precisely when important phases of the preparations for the papal visit were taking place, there was almost a leadership-vacuum in the Syro-Malabar Church as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Changanacherry was transferred to Ernakulam and had to adjust himself there, while the incumbent of the See of Changanacherry came too late.

It was on the 18th of December 1985 that Archbishop Angelo Fernandez of Delhi held a press conference and declared among other things that Sr. Alphonsa would be beatified by the Pope on his visit to India, keeping silent over Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, whose beatification process had finished much earlier than that of Sr. Alphonsa and everything was set for the Pope's declaration of it at Kottayam. This caused much confusion and worry which was evidenced in the many telephone calls that reached the Postulator General appointed for the cause of canonization of Fr. Chavara in Rome. Well, the fact was that some interested parties were trying to delay the cause of Fr. Chavara, on the false principle: 'if I don't get, you too should'nt get'.

There are eight dioceses of the Syro-Malabar Church in the North, besides thousands of Syro-Malabar emigrants

who are now by force of circumstances under Latin dioceses. It should have been only fair to arrange a visit to one of these dioceses. It is all the more surprising when one remembers that in the same stadium in Delhi the Pope celebrated twice with a small community such as could only be gathered in the capital city.

It is another telling fact that not a single major meet-the-pope-programme was foreseen in the South though most Catholics are there as also the majority of priests, religious and seminarians. Yet the special address to priests was delivered in Goa on 6th February, to the religious in Bombay on 10th February, to the youth also on the same day in Bombay, and to the seminarians in Pune.

One may be wondering why the Pope did not visit the St. Thomas apostolic seminary at Kottayam nor surprisingly the tomb of Blessed Chavara and St. Joseph Monastery, Mannanam, the Mother House of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate which is the oldest existing indigenous religious congregation of India. It was close to the place where the Pope landed for the ceremonies at Kottayam.

Another very serious omission is that there was not a single celebration of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy of the Malankara Church by the Pope or in his presence. According to the Second Vatican, one is to be "convinced that the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation, of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebration, especially in the same Eucharist"<sup>5</sup>. For orientals the Liturgy is the expression par excellence of the individual church, here is manifested its theology, spirituality and faith. It is the Eucharist which makes the Church, as the Church makes the Eucharist<sup>6</sup>.

We were trying to show how the visit of Pope John Paul II could have been more successful if we had taken note of some such aspects of the Church in India. This does not in anyway mean that the visit was not a success; it was

5. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 41

6. H. De Lubac, *Meditation sur l'Eglise*, Paris 19532, pp. 107-137

a grand one on many respects and the Pope himself is convinced of that as is clear from some of his pronouncements after the visit. Above all, he was able to sense the real situation of the church directly. He could see where in India christianity is really at home, he could see where there are christians in India. He understood that the deeper reality of India lies not in a superficial uniformity but in unity and diversity.

The Pope has also realized the real need for dialogue with other great world religions. He has grown in love for India and the Indian people.

The church in India will flourish not by doing away with the different charisms and traditions that are available to her but by developing them for the enrichment of the universal Church. God we believe in is triune, the church we profess is a communion.

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## The Visit of the Pope - some comments

The Editor has asked me to write a brief reflection on the Pope's visit from a Protestant point of view. For sure, there was no uniform response or reaction to the Pope's visit by the Protestants in India. Frankly speaking, for a good many Protestants, the Pope's visit was a non-event. This is not surprising! For, the Protestants lack any consciousness about the Pope's authority or attach any special significance to his office. His visit was considered a routine event, a religious dignitary visiting his followers. Perhaps a lukewarm response to the Pope's visit by some Protestants is largely due to this. There is, however, a group of Protestants who readily went along with their Catholic counterparts in receiving the Pope. For them, it was an occasion of religious festivity and an opportunity to express their sense of belonging to the larger Christian community. There is yet a minority who raised critical questions and had some misgivings about the Pope's visit. These are mostly Christian social action groups joined by their counterparts in the Catholic Church. Their fear was that the Pope's visit will only aggravate the communal tension already prevailing in our society. They even pleaded with the Pope to meet them and express his support for the organised movements of marginalised sections of society. Of course, the Pope or better, the leadership that was responsible for the visit paid very little attention to them. Naturally, they were quite disillusioned by the Pope's visit.

I may not represent any of the above groups but I venture to make some comments by way of raising issues that are relevant for the on-going life of the Church.

(1) The Pope is an ecumenical figure and his visit therefore could have been an occasion for furthering the ecumenical witness of the Churches in India. But, the Pope's visit in India has not fulfilled this expectation. The visit was a 'Catholic Affair'. Other main churches in this country were hardly involved in the planning or in the main events of the visit. I am also surprised that in some of the highest councils of the Protestant churches in India, the Pope's visit was never mentioned or discussed. Truly, we have a long way to go before achieving even a working relationship between the Churches in India. The Catholic Church under the leadership of the Pope is making its contribution to the ecumenical movement. The Lima Document of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches represents a consensus on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry by a representative group of theologians of Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. The document is being widely discussed among the Churches. But what impact such global initiative has on the local situation ! The visit would have been an excellent opportunity for a united witness, reaffirming our common heritage of faith. This was missed.

(2) The Pope's visit was significant in that it was made an occasion to highlight the Churches' response to some of the problems and issues of our situation. The Pope has expressed his concern over the two issues that affect us: religious pluralism and poverty.

It was admirable that a special effort was made to have a meet-together with the representatives of our different religions for a dialogue. The Pope's speech on that occasion was an excellent articulation of the Church's willingness to enter into a dialogue with other religions. He carefully avoided a condescending attitude towards other religions and provided a climate for healthy interaction between Christianity and other faiths. In this the Protestants have much to learn from the Catholic Church. The inculturation, indigenisation and other experiments are bold and refreshing attempts at relating the gospel to the culture of our

people. Protestants are still reluctant to make any such attempts. Their theology and piety continue to be dominated by the European structure of thinking and in recent times, American fundamentalism is also contributing its share to Protestant consciousness. The cumulative effect of all these is the nurturing of an attitude of exclusivism in faith that is incapable of relating meaningfully with the other faiths and traditions. I hope the lead given by the Catholic Church and the Pope will be followed up by all the Churches.

There should be a word of caution here. In the structured programmes on dialogue between faiths we tend to focus our attention on that part of the religion which is well-established and articulated. The participants represent the institutional forms of religion and their interests. But the religiosity of ordinary people is of a different genre. The traditional symbols and myths take on a new meaning in their struggles for daily living. Thus, in every religion, Christianity included, we have the polarity between the elite tradition and people's tradition. While the former is aggressively present in all the organised programmes, the latter is conspicuously absent. The vitality and wholesomeness of people's tradition is to be articulated and strengthened. The dialogue programme should be sensitive to the stirrings of the people.

(3) The Pope's response to the condition of poverty was along predictable lines. As usual there was a great deal of sympathy expressed for the poor. It is not clear whether the Pope wants the Church to commit itself to a radical struggle for justice as the only way to get rid of structural poverty. The Pope has refused to say anything about the struggles of the marginalised, some of them initiated by priests and lay workers of the Catholic Church. The Church hierarchy is still wary of any radical action when it comes to solving the problem of injustice. I wish it were possible for the Pope to have a meeting with social action groups that are struggling with the marginalised all over our country. That would have been a marvellous witness to the 'non-communal' character of the gospel.



In this regard, I find the Pope's statement about the priests' role most unhelpful. In a statement he seems to have indicated that 'political' involvement of priests goes against the core of priesthood. I should have thought that the core of priesthood is expressed by the priest's identification with the struggles of the people. In that one cannot make a simple distinction between political and spiritual. We have lived long with this kind of false dichotomy and the sooner we get out of it the better.

A final comment: The visit of the Pope, the euphoria created by it, the mammoth crowd that assembled for his 'darshan', the long motorcade, the massive pandals glittering with usual embellishments, the specially erected dias — all these are impressive. What do these amount to?

The church in India is poor. Barring a few affluent sections in Kerala, a large majority of our Christians are below poverty line. But the image projected by these special events and our institutions is that of a rich and powerful church. This is our dilemma. Are we the cruciform church in India? Or are we still basking under the glory of imperial power? Unless we face this dilemma in the very life and ministry of the Church, we cannot be true to our master.

K. C. Abraham

# **Inculturating and the Liturgies during the Papal Visit\*: an Assessment**

## **Introduction**

During the first part of his visit to India Pope John Paul II repeatedly stressed that inculturation belongs to the very mission of the Church<sup>1</sup>. Inculturation is not something optional, left to private initiative, but an essential, indispensable dimension of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in every land and century. Hence no true Christian can remain indifferent, still less those ordained to exercise a leadership function. On the first day of his visit the Holy Father immediately emphasized the importance of inculturation in his address to our bishops: Your pastoral efforts to bear witness to the Gospel "must be done with due regard for the great challenge of inculturation. God's revelation took place in a specific culture but from the very beginning it was destined for all cultures. It is the Church's task to bring the Good News of salvation to all cultures and to

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\* The author was not present at any of the liturgies celebrated during the Papal visit. He got some information from the TV coverage and a videotape. He is greatly indebted to the written comments from Frs. T.K. John (Delhi), Jos de Cuyper (Ranchi), Shillong, L.Colussi (Calcutta), K. L. Satur (Madras), Mark Viegas (Mangalore), Ambrose Arackal (Kalamassery), Lorenzo Fernando (Pune); he was not able to get information on what happened at other places. These comments are published in: *Word and Worship* 19 (1986), no. 3, p. 95-114.

1. Homily on 1st February in Delhi, Address to the Indian Bishops on 1st February in Delhi, Homily on 2nd February in Delhi, Address on 3rd February in St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, Homilies on 3rd February in Shillong, 4th February in Calcutta, 5th February in Madras, 6th February in Goa, 8th February in Pune.

present it in a way that corresponds to the genius of each people"<sup>2</sup>. Our bishops have the specific responsibility in the task of "ensuring genuine and faithful adaptation", that is, they *must make sure* that:

- inculturation takes place;
- it is genuine, that is, authentic, expressing the 'genius' of the people;
- it is faithful to the Good News to be proclaimed.

The Holy Father continues: "The bishops have a particular responsibility with regard to liturgical inculturation, which aims at bringing 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph. 3:8) ever more effectively into the Church's life of worship"<sup>3</sup>. There cannot be any doubt about the fact that John Paul II considers inculturation important and holds that liturgical inculturation must be carried out speedily, animated and guided by the bishops in communion with the whole Church and collaboration with the Holy See.<sup>4</sup> If gestures speak louder than words, the jovial way in which the Pope accepted and responded to cultural gestures and expressions were a sign of his openness and happiness about them. In Ranchi he clearly said in his homily pointing to the symbols on his vestments: "The symbolism you have embroidered show how you have integrated your culture into Christian worship. I am proud to wear these vestments!"<sup>4</sup>

The liturgies prepared for and celebrated during the Papal visit are an indication of how far the Catholic Church in India has come as regards inculturation. In many places Indian cultural-religious elements were used though none of the liturgies were fully indigenous. An attentive observer could not but see that, the most important parts of the liturgy, for example, the Eucharistic Prayer remained untouched, though typically Indian cultural-religious elements were often used before and sometimes during the celebrations. Some of these belonged to the Twelve Points,

2. Address to the Indian Bishops on 1st February in Delhi

3. *Ibid.*

4. Homily on 3rd February in Ranchi



officially approved by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship<sup>5</sup>, such as *arati*, use of the oil lamp instead of candles, a few such as dance and the ceremonial washing of feet as a sign of welcome, were not included at that time. Basing myself on the assessments sent by my 'reporters', I would like to assess the following.

### Planning together

At least in certain places the liturgical committee was constituted of lay people, religious, priests and the local bishops: at some stage also persons of the region participated in the deliberations. Although the theme, a particular specification of the general motto: "The Call of the Lord to Unity" was allotted by the National Preparatory Committee, the regional/local committees creatively exercised their legitimate freedom in translating that theme into liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations. The involvement of persons from all the sections of God's people is significant; it manifests a growth of ecclesial awareness: liturgy is the responsibility of all God's people. One of the 'reporters' is rather apprehensive about the sudden involvement of the laity and raises the question: "Is the laity trusted and taken into account *only* on occasions like papal visits, may be because some of them are very influential with the Government? What about the normal running of things?"<sup>6</sup> I would say: if the papal visit has brought about a greater sense of collegiality and co-responsibility in all the sections of God's people and has put a first wedge in the clericalism still so prevailing in our Church, the visit has been a great blessing. A bad omen, however, is that during the actual celebrations some committee members of Delhi experienced that what had been planned and decided upon together was quite

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5. *Consilium ad Exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*, Prot., N. 802/69, d.d. April 25, 1969, see: *Report of the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India*, Ernakulam, January 7-16, 1970, p. 192-194.

6. See: *Word and Worship*, a. c. 104

different from what was celebrated. No account was given about the considerable changes made: by whom or for what reason they were made was not made known. Team-work, collegiality and co-responsibility imply *accountability*. Otherwise the planning-together becomes an eye-wash.

The planning-together also revealed how divergent the Indian Church really is. Even at the local level there are a number of ethnic groups with their own cultures and values. Some groups strongly felt that what they had been educated into was the Christian culture, from which the traditional liturgy sprang. The process to prepare the liturgical celebration for the papal visit became for them a first education in the values of our cultural-religious heritage which had become alien to them, but which Vatican II calls us not only to respect and appreciate, but also to protect and promote<sup>7</sup>. Both in word and deed Pope John Paul confirmed this teaching.

### Language and music

The reporters unanimously praised the efforts made to stimulate active participation of all the faithful by using as far as possible the regional/local language and music. The Pope really embodied this concern, for everywhere he addressed the people at least a few times in their own language. I have been told that he practised these sentences meticulously even on the way to his next engagement. The enthusiasm and gratitude of the people was an experiential reward for the trouble he took. His example reminds us of our responsibility to celebrate the liturgy in the language of the people.

The hymns were in the regional/local languages and melodies. Indian instruments were widely employed. Some reporters comment on the high quality of the hymns and music, others lament that too great an importance was given to the choir which did a commendable job, but at the detriment of the involvement of the people. Choirs, choir di-

<sup>7</sup>. N. A. 2, AG 11:15, 18, 22, LG 8; GS 56-62

rectors and composers in particular, still need to become convinced that they are servants of the congregation. Many texts are meant to be sung by the whole congregation; artistic quality should, therefore, be combined with simplicity so that the congregation can sing the parts that are to be sung by them; it is one of the main means to unite the whole community and to foster their participation. We should, however, compliment the members of the choirs and orchestras who practised so many hours to render such a great service in this important field of inculturation. We may reasonably expect that what happened after the Eucharistic Congress in Bombay will be repeated; the best hymns and music of the Papal visit will rapidly spread over the whole region, if not the whole country and become a sign and instrument of unity.

### **Decoration, arrangement of the place of worship and vestments**

I have the impression that those in charge of local arrangements took great and creative care to make the place of worship as worthy and suitable for celebration as possible. The location of the altar, lectern, presidential seat, seats for concelebrants etc. had to guarantee maximum visibility and participation. Unfortunately the tight security arrangements put a number of restrictions. Dancers also needed space. The zeal to give a message and to manifest local/regional artistry and creativity, related to the theme, greatly influenced the building of the sanctuary. The backdrops, decorations and altar were a commendable example of inculturation.

Two questions come to my mind: were the size and location of the altar and lectern proportionate to their central importance in the total celebration? What will be the effect of this example of inculturation on the architecture of our churches and the furnishing of the sanctuary? Is it not strange that we are anxious to show our 'Indian' identity to 'outsiders' (foreign visitors) abroad, while we shun that identity in our daily life?

How to understand that the *Indian oil lamp (diya,*



*kuthuvilakku*), one of the most common signs of 'divine presence' in India, burned so prominently at many of the papal liturgies, while in most of our churches the oil lamp is still either totally absent or serves as a mere decoration on solemn occasions. Candles are still widely used. In how many places has the Easter Candle been indigenised and the oil lamp become the symbol of the Risen and Living Lord? Have the papal liturgies paved the way to make at least this beginning?

What about the *removal of footwear*, a sign significant to persons of other religious persuasions? I have the impression that arrangements for this biblical practice also were not made at any place. A lost opportunity! It has nothing to do with any teaching of the Church, but it shows our blatant insensitivity and blindness in the field of signs. Is not liturgy the celebration of the invisible mysteries of God in visible signs? The Holy Father manifested this sensitivity when he visited the samadhi of Gandhiji. If anyone had pointed out to him that the removal of one's footwear is the normal and customary sign of respect for all places of worship and hence for the act of worship itself and if it had been practised at least by those in the 'sanctuary' of the celebrations, it would have given a push to the introduction of this venerable practice (on Good Friday even in the cold West!) in our churches and one odd, wholly alien element of our worship might soon disappear.

The many discussions about the *liturgical vestments* in Delhi were quite revealing. Quite a number of people could earlier hardly think of anything else than a chasuble for the Pope and the concelebrants, but others considered it very important that the liturgical dress for all should be a shawl in view of the cultural-religious tradition of the North Indian. The colour of the shawl, neither saffran, nor green or yellow, but white for the Pope and cream for the concelebrants would indicate the specific Christian identity. The discussion in the committee was almost a course on inculturation but a consensus was reached. This relatively small question was all the more significant, for it was to be

expected that—through the TV the eyes of millions of people would experience the 'Indianness' of the Church rather than its being foreign. T.K. John comments:

"The great majority of the concelebrants (cardinals, bishops, priests) used the shawl. This use of the shawl at the first Eucharist in India celebrated by the Pastor of Rome with the hierarchy and in the presence of representatives from more than thirteen dioceses of the North, is seen with certain significance. It signalled the possibility of change. The change in vestments opens up further changes in our way of thinking, being and acting. For us in the North it meant that new forms of collective existence, exploring new avenues, and worshipping in more relevant and meaningful ways are possible and imperative. Break with the past and setting aside once-valuable but now irrelevant traditions and practices are possible."<sup>8</sup>

In other places one simply accepted the traditional Roman/Antiochian vestments, though sometimes decorated with Indian symbols. This may have neutralised the effect of the Delhi celebration to some extent. On the other hand, the very fact that the shawl was used by the great majority of the concelebrants (cardinals, bishops and priests) in a concelebration with the Holy Father should convince everyone that such usage is legitimate. Hence it should now become obligatory to think and move in the direction of inculturation as regards the place of worship, furnishing of the church and the vestments. They are small, but significant steps towards making the Church in India more authentically Indian, towards taking the mystery of the incarnation more seriously than before, towards getting rid of docetic features, not seldom tainted by colonial overtones.

### **During the celebration**

During the celebrations themselves indigenous elements were few in number, though we should not under-

8. *Word and Worship*, a.c. 97

rate the significance of the elements already mentioned: language, music Indian oil lamp, etc. In spite of the fact that some texts were adapted too and made more concrete, the core of the liturgical celebrations remained alien and traditional. Two fundamental issues are at stake:

- 1) the embodiment of the struggles and aspirations of the people
- 2) the expression of the heritage of the country/region.

1. *The aspirations and struggles of the people* formed an essential part of the texts prepared by the liturgical committee in Delhi. Some committee members were painfully surprised that the texts had been changed, as they were deeply convinced that a more contextual celebration would have touched the hearts of many of those who are still suspicious of the Christian presence<sup>9</sup>. The underlying question is: by whom and why were these texts changed? Is the local Church itself not capable of composing at least some suitable liturgical texts, for none of the more 'sacrosanct' texts were touched. Why this 'remote' control? Has the Catholic Church in India not reached its adulthood and can it not act responsibly on its own in deep communion with the other local Churches which together constitute the one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church?

2. *The expression of the Indian heritage* was, apart from the elements already mentioned, limited to dances at the entrance and offertory, regional/local expressions of welcome and gifts of local/regional agriculture, industry, art or handicraft and maharati at doxology or consecration. The observation of the 'reporter' from Shillong is to the point: "The whole of India made a big effort to give the papal visit a local colouring. I appreciate the start. But is it going to be only an exception or a foretaste of things to come? Was the effort at inculturation a chance to show the Pope how well our people can dance or a very serious beginning at a process of inculturation which should go far beyond dancing?" He later continues: The appreciation which the Holy Father showed for the dances and costumes

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9. *Ibid*, a.c. 99

"was more than a written permission to make the liturgy become entirely local"<sup>10</sup>.

### Questions

When the 'servant of the servants of God' comes for a pastoral visit to a religiously sensitive nation which links Christianity with political domination, cultural superiority and religious intolerance, as much as possible should be left to the Church he visits. He may be expected to act as the President of the communion of Churches rather than the Ruler over the entire Church, as Brother bishop rather than the Head of the universal Church. As a person who shoulders such great responsibilities in the complex world of today, he needs a considerable entourage, everyone understands this. However, whether members of this entourage should be seen to direct celebrations is quite a different story. T. K. John rightly observes: "To see a foreign person (the Master of Ceremonies) taking over command from the hands of the people of the place was not a welcome sight. For the people of Delhi, especially for the adherents of other religions it was incomprehensible. To them the Church in India was still under foreign control, as some of them remarked"<sup>11</sup>. K. L. Satur from Madras shares similar reservations <sup>12</sup>. In Delhi, the Master of Ceremonies hurt many deeply: those present in the stadium and numerous people who looked at the TV noticed with shock that the tilak was removed from the forehead of the Holy Father almost immediately after receiving it. Thus the glorious welcome became like a handshake followed by a slap in the face. Why was a foreigner so visibly in command?

It is well-known that in certain regions of our country the practice of communion on the tongue is a cause of embarrassment. Reasons for the re-introduction of the initial practice of communion in the hand hold good for India as well. If the occasion of the papal visit had been used to instruct the people adequately regarding the pra-

10. a.c. p. 105.

11. a.c. p. 99.

12. a.c. p. 106



ctice of communion in the hand and to introduce it then in the celebrations, many would have seen and experienced that it does not at all detract from our reverence for the self-gift of Jesus in the Eucharist. The Church in India would have smoothly sailed into a practice of receiving Holy Communion which corresponds far better to our culture. Again a lost opportunity!

One of my 'reporters' mentions that in his place only three changeable presidential prayers were original, giving them a local flavour and making them more concrete than the rather general and abstract prayers sent from Rome. Why such modesty in creativity? We could have done far more.

More questions arise when we hear that 'higher authorities' almost rejected all the liturgical texts prepared by the Delhi committee which took great pains to make them really contextual. It does not augur well that texts which embodied the struggles and aspirations of the people and the heritage of the country were found unacceptable. Would it not have been wonderful, when people of other faiths and perhaps even unbelievers had felt in the depth of their hearts that we share their joys and hopes, their griefs and anxieties, especially as regards the poor and oppressed, as we claim in *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 1)? Then the liturgies would have confirmed and celebrated what the Pope put with such enthusiastic conviction in his speeches and gestures? Liturgy would have been a celebration of life.

Also the following question, clearly formulated by T. K. John, is pertinent in view of dialogue:

Why was the seat of the Pope during the Religious-cultural Experience, on February 2nd, far removed from those of the guest speakers who represented some of the major religions of our country? A Church that is called to dialogue with other religions may have to lead others in practice as well<sup>13</sup>.

## conclusion

All my 'reporters' have mentioned with a legitimate sense of achievement 'elements of inculturation', but most of them mention almost in the same breath that an *arati* here and a few dances there do not constitute a liturgy that is as fully Indian as it is Christian. Such adaptations give these celebrations at most an Indian flavour. Vatican II had a wider and deeper vision, when it stated: "In some places and circumstances, however, an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed" (SC 40). What is needed and on what we should work is: a liturgy which is born from the Indian 'soul'!

The Christ mystery has now reached the cave of the heart of Indian Christians. From the cave of our hearts we are called to celebrate it in our liturgy, community worship, and to proclaim it prophetically in all the areas of our life. Those who brought the Good News naturally celebrated it as they were accustomed to do it in their homeland, though some of them soon realised that their own religio-cultural expressions should not be absolutized. Vatican II has put a radical stop to cultural colonialism and racial superiority. Several addresses of Pope John Paul and the apparent joy with which he accepted the more indigenous expressions during his pilgrimage amply show that inculturation — not only in the liturgy, but in all the aspects of Christian life — is an urgent need. We cannot be 'Catholic' without being fully Indian; our liturgies should manifest this. They should celebrate both the rich religio-cultural heritage and the contemporary struggles of our people.

Some of the ancient Indian Churches are perhaps inclined to ask with Nicodemus: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?" (Jn. 3:4). And Jesus will answer: all of you must be liberated from what is inauthentic; what has been imposed from the outside, even when it has become dear to you. The celebrations of the Christ mystery should

emerge from the cave of your heart. They must embody the values, aspirations and struggles of you and those of your brothers and sisters, who have been touched and transformed by Christ's total commitment to the Father and the Kingdom and are now led by His Spirit.

The pastoral visit of the Holy Father has certainly encouraged the local Churches in India to be truly local Churches, not provinces of the Church of Rome. As India is a vast sub-continent with great and enriching regional differences, every local Church should become truly creative in all aspects of Christian life. The time of liturgical uniformity has definitely passed. A new era has begun. No Church can shirk its responsibility as the Word has to continue to become flesh. We should take up our responsibility in genuine communion (no one lording it over the other) with other local Churches all over the world under the inspiring leadership of the Church of Rome and its bishop, our Pope. This genuine, giving and receiving communion will make our Catholicity blossom in a rich variety of cultural experiences and expressions.

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# Speeches of John Paul II in India: a Theological Analysis

It has been said that for the majority of the audience, what the Pope did in India, and his very presence, were far more important than what he said. "And yet, the speeches of the Pope may be considered a solid contribution... to the life of the Indian Church."<sup>1</sup> This paper is an attempt to assess the contribution from a theological point of view.

Did the Pope develop any new theology? Perhaps nothing other than what the second Vatican has said and the many documents of Pope Paul VI and of the present Pope himself<sup>2</sup>. Yet he has made a contribution; he tried in his own personal way to contextualize a number of ideas in the conciliar and papal documents and to speak accordingly to the Church in India and to the Indian people as a whole.

This paper takes maximum care to let the Pope speak, keeping personal comments of the author to the minimum. The speeches as they are published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English Edition<sup>3</sup>, are the only sources used for this paper.

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1. *Vidyajyoti*, 50 (1985-86), p, 174.

2. The main documents (i) of Paul VI cited are: "Evangelium Nuntiandi", "Populorum Progressio", "Humanae Vitae", "Ecclesiam Suam"; (ii) of John Paul II: "Redemptor Hominis", "Redemptionis Donum", "Familiaris Consortio", "Laborem Exercens", "Salvifici Doloris". A few others cited once or twice.

3. Feb., 3, Feb., 10, Feb., 17, 1986.



## Objectives of the Papal Visit to India

On 26 January 1986, Pope John Paul was speaking to the people gathered for 'Angelus' in St. Peter's Square, Rome. Referring to his forthcoming visit to India he told them: "In a few days, to be exact, next Friday, 31 January, I will begin my apostolic visit to India... I go to India as a pilgrim of peace, and as a shepherd who has the duty to confirm his brothers in the faith (cf. Lk 22:32), in ecclesial unity, and in their witness to Christ."<sup>4</sup> The two motives implied in his statement were further clarified in his discourse on arrival in Delhi airport. He said: "My purpose in coming to India has both a religious and a human dimension. I came to pay a pastoral visit to the Catholics of India, and I come in friendship with a deep desire to pay honour to all your people and to your different cultures."<sup>5</sup> The visit to India was envisaged by the Pope as a double pilgrimage: a pilgrimage first "to the shrine which is the People of God living in this vast land of India"; equally important is his pilgrimage as 'a servant of peace and unity' to the other shrine which is all the people in India with their cultures and religions, with their effort to build up a nation of peace and prosperity, with their effort to make their contribution to a world civilization which is in struggle to be born, civilization of love, of equality, freedom and universal brotherhood<sup>6</sup>.

## The India, Pope John Paul longed to visit

India is one of the countries where Christianity has been present since the Apostolic times. It has the rare reputation of having been evangelized by St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ<sup>7</sup>, and the ancient

4. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (hereafter abbreviated as Os), February 2, 1986, p.3

5. *Ibid*, p. 1

6. Cf. *Ibid*, pp. 1-3.

7. The Pope referred to the strong tradition of the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas in India several times during his journey through India, in Delhi, Madras, and at several places in Kerala. Cf. Os, 3 Feb 1986, p.3; 10 Feb; pp. 14-15; 17 Feb., pp. 2-3 etc.

christians there glory in the name of St. Thomas Christians. In the course of history, dedicated missionaries were instrumental in spreading it in different parts of the country. For nearly two thousand years, the Christian Church has formed an integral part of the development and life of the Indian people. Though Christians form a small minority, they have been very active and have made important contributions by their "dedicated involvement in various fields of human advancement", such as education, health service, social assistance and other developmental programmes<sup>8</sup>. The relationship between Church and State has been cordial. The services of the Church have been appreciated by the people of India and their leaders<sup>9</sup>. It is this 'Christian' India the Pope desired to visit as the universal pastor of the Catholic Church.

The other dimension of his pilgrimage which is both religious and humanitarian loomed large in his actions and speeches. The India he longed to visit, of which he desired to deepen his knowledge, which he discovered while on pilgrimage through different parts of the country, is a land of ancient cultures and the home of many religions. The Pope was fascinated by this India, so ancient and yet so young. Her ancient culture has achieved artistic, literary, linguistic, philosophical and social expression of the highest degree. It is not a dead culture but fully alive today and dynamic enough to adapt itself to the ethos and needs of the present time<sup>10</sup>. Today's India reflects a fine blending of the old and the new. The present culture of

8. Perhaps the Pope is not quite aware of various other services the Indian Christians, especially the St. Thomas Christians have rendered and continue to render to the Indian people in the fields of agriculture, trade, defence etc.

9. Cf. John Paul's talk at 'Angelus' on 26 January 1986: *Os*, Feb. 26, p.3; his talk at Delhi airport on arrival: *Ibid*, p.1.

10. India's cultures are living phenomena and the Church in India is called upon to encounter and assimilate this living reality, just as the Christians of the first three or four centuries were called upon to do it vis-a-vis the then living cultures like the Hebrew, Syrian, Greek and Roman.

India resulted from the inevitable and often needed social change and from its response to the challenges of modern industry and technology. All this is a sign of a society that is living and dynamic<sup>11</sup>.

### **Mahatma Gandhi, an embodiment of Indian culture**

No wonder this India rooted in tradition and open to modern developments, which has allowed the spiritual and the secular to co-exist and interpenetrate has produced a number of leaders, the foremost among them of our period being Mahatma Gandhi. He embodied in himself so many noble and spiritual values to which India has always held fast. Being a typical product of the Indian combination of culture and religion, spiritual values and human and social concerns, he is most deservedly called the 'father of the nation'.

Pope John Paul's pilgrimage of good will and peace made its debut on 1 February, not at the airport but at Rajghat, at the Gandhi *Samadhi*, just two days after the 38th anniversary of the martyrdom of "this extraordinary man", the embodiment of the highest values of India, this hero of humanity. The Samadhi marked the end of his earthly life, but it stands as a living monument to his towering personality and his universal message that is living on in the hearts and minds of the people in India, and in the whole world. Kneeling at the Samadhi and silently meditating on the person, life and teaching of the Mahatma seemed to quench the thirst of the Pope to experience the soul of India. This monument dedicated to the venerable memory of the father of the nation belongs in a sense to the

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It is interesting to note here what John Paul II told the Oriental bishops of India on 19 December 1985: "... it is customary when speaking to the Oriental Churches to refer to their venerable antiquity and to the richness of their tradition. This is right and good. But in considering the Oriental Churches in India, I am equally impressed by the extraordinary youthfulness they manifest." *L'Osservatore Romano* (Daily), 24 February 1986, p.3)

11. Cf. Os, February 3, pp. 1-3.

history of the entire human family. There the Pope remembered that Mahatma Gandhi's noble devotion to God and his respect for every living being; his path of non-violence was a bright reflection of the words of Jesus: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake'. (Mt 5:3-10)<sup>12</sup>

### Call to Pilgrim faith

As mentioned above, Pope John envisioned his journey to and through India as a pilgrimage. Five days before starting on his journey, he told the Romans that he was going as a pilgrim to India, a great country "where pilgrimage is an expression and a means of spirituality"<sup>13</sup>. During his visit he repeated this idea several times. He chose the theme of pilgrimage for the first homily<sup>14</sup>, he preached in India. He saw his visit to India as a "pilgrimage first to the shrine which is the People of God living in India"<sup>15</sup>, and secondly to the shrine which is the whole people of India with their cultures and religions, and various other noble values. It was then quite natural that the idea of pilgrimage and the pilgrim state of man's life on earth was chosen for his first celebration<sup>16</sup>.

The Gospel passage selected for the liturgy contained the words of Jesus: "I am the way and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6; cf. also 14:2... I go to prepare a

12. Cf. The message delivered at Rajghat: Os, February 3, p. 2; Cf. also 'Angelus' message of 26 January: *ibid.* p.3

13. Cf. Os, February 3, p. 3.

14. The Pope preached 12 homilies during Masses celebrated in different parts of India: two in Delhi, one each in Ranchi, Shillong, Calcutta, Madras, Goa, Cochin, Kottayam, Trivandrum, Bombay, Pune. The first homily was preached in Delhi in the Mass he celebrated with 124 bishops of India on 1 February evening at Indira Gandhi Stadium. Cf.

*ibid.*, p. 2f,

15. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2.

16. A. Pushparajan, "Reflections on the Pope's Visit from the View Point of Inter-Religious Dialogue", *Vidyajyoti*, 50 (1986), p. 195f, where the author points out the significance of the concept of 'pilgrimage' for inter-religious dialogue.



place for you"). Pope John Paul interpreted these words as referring to "our pilgrimage through faith", "our call to pilgrim faith". Jesus presents himself here as our path to the Father, our guide, and the sustainer of our life which, we know from the Gospel, is "a pilgrimage towards the Father's house."

In his very nature man is conscious that he is "passing through the world", his life on earth is "transitory", beginning at his birth and ending with his death. This consciousness is very deep in India: man is "a pilgrim of the Absolute". This consciousness finds its expression in "the anguished cry of the soul for the Absolute", the "age-old yearning for the Infinite, a constant awareness of the divine presence and endless manifestations of religious feelings through popular feasts and festivals". This quest for God and the concomitant experience of the divine presence is common to all religious people. "In India they have been accompanied by great simplicity, asceticism and renunciation."<sup>17</sup> The numerous *sadhus* of India and the millions of people who participate in periodical pilgrimages make India a pilgrim land whose "pilgrimage is an expression and a means of spirituality"<sup>18</sup>.

A succinct description, or a sort of definition of the Christian Church as envisioned in the Second Vatican Council would be: the People of God constituted in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and *marching* towards the Father, are on a *pilgrimage* to the Father's house. The People of God are from the world and are in the world, but 'not of the world'. This implies that on the one hand they do not belong here; they are pilgrims moving towards a goal beyond 'this world'. Their life in this world is 'transitory', they have no permanent home here. They are on the

17. Pope Paul VI expressed this idea very forcibly on 2 December 1964 when he addressed in Bombay a vast crowd of Indian people belonging to different religious traditions: "Yours...is the home of a nation that has sought God with relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and hymns of fervent prayer."

18. Cf. 'Angelus' talk on 26 February 1986: Os, February 3, p. 3.

march. On the other hand this march is not a passage through an unknown land, inhabited by strange people. It is a march in the company of all the people of the world, amidst a reality that is world; it is a march through the earthly home of man, a home man is bound to make ever more habitable for himself and his fellow creatures. This aspect calls for active involvement of Christians in the world.

It is this involvement which is responsible for the growth of culture. 'Christians, on pilgrimage towards the heavenly city, should seek and savour the things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, but rather increases the weight of their obligation to work with all men in constructing a more human world' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 57). Pope John Paul explains this idea further<sup>19</sup>: "Man in his pilgrim life is all the more worthy of respect and love and care in the many circumstances of earthly living precisely because he is destined to live for ever. And all true human culture, taking into account the dignity of man and his final destiny, is an aid to man in his noble and righteous living, in this land of pilgrimage." It is to this task of man that St Paul invites us when he says: 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if anything worthy of praise, think about these things' (Phil 4:8)<sup>20</sup>.

Pilgrim man's responsibility to build up a culture, 'a better world', is obvious. Man is also aware that a constant change for the better is taking place in the world, and he knows either through natural intuition and reasoning, or more surely through faith that the source of this change is God who will bring about the final transformation

19. *Os*, February 3, p. 3.

20. When the Pope quotes this passage he seems to have two objectives in mind: i) the general responsibility of all Christians to involve themselves in the process of developing cultures and just societies; ii) the need to be open to the socio-cultural and religious values of India and their adaptation in Christian thinking and living especially in India.

of the world. Man is thus aware of the divine presence in the world, in the daily occurrences of life and in its toils. He knows that through his efforts to create a better world he is cooperating with God. Man's experience of God's dynamic presence in the development of culture intensifies his longing for the final stage to which God is leading the world and that experience and longing in turn give a boost to his efforts.

In spite of this consoling experience and the mental and spiritual energy it unleashes, man is still left in the dark as to the final shape of the world towards which God is leading him. The ultimate form of the world man is engaged in building up is beyond his grasp, and is, faith tells him, beyond his human capabilities. He is obliged to look forward to the unknown dimensions of the 'finished product', which is to be brought about by a vertical action from above, from God. Man is thus caught up in a tension between the awareness of his responsibility to build up a world, and his uncertainty about the full dimension the world is going to take at the end. The experience of this tension is characteristic of the pilgrim state of man. It is this tension of the pilgrim that Pope John Paul tried to explain in his first homily and that in the Indian context.

It is true, the Pope pointed out, that God has communicated Himself through revelation in Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, the whole truth about God and world (cf. *Dei Verum*, 6). Despite this God and his plans still remain "an inscrutable mystery". So man, the pilgrim of the Absolute, continues throughout his life to seek the face of God. Only at the end of this pilgrimage of faith, man comes to the Father's house and sees God "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). This quest to see God face to face, this deepest desire of the human spirit, this "reaching" to God in Jesus Christ pushes man on, and becomes the source of his life — begun here on earth in the 'darkness of faith' to reach its fulness of vision of God, as He is. The Eucharist is the most holy sacrament, the fullest and most expressive sign of our pilgrimage through faith. It makes us experience

the presence of God and of his transforming and uniting power in the world and cry out with hope: 'the Lord is near'<sup>21</sup>.

### Servant church and option for the Poor

It is the self-emptying image of the servant Jesus, it is the image of the servant model that is Mary, that the Church should project in the world today on the poor of India. February 2, being the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple', the reading chosen for the Mass was Lk 2:22ff., and the Pope made this occasion to impress upon the Church to project such an image. Christ is the 'King of Glory', he is the salvation... prepared in the presence of the peoples', 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles'. But he enters the temple of Jerusalem "not as a powerful ruler but as a little child in his mother's arms... an infant in silence, in poverty, and in the company of the poor and the wise... wrapped in the mystery of littleness, ... power hidden in simplicity and helplessness". It is in this spirit of silence, poverty, littleness that the Church would like to serve the India of Mahatma Gandhi. In spite of all the external pomp and show that accompanied the journey of Pope John Paul, it is in this humble Christian spirit that he wished to present himself to India, the representative and disciple of the humble and poor child of Nazareth<sup>22</sup>.

Mary visiting Elizabeth was the theme the Pope chose for his homily in Mangalore. The event brings before us the servant model of the Church that is Mary — a model of loving service to fellow beings. The Pope further elaborated the Mary-servant-theme in his homily in Trivandrum. As Christians, we are sent to serve and thus follow the example of Jesus who said: 'I am among you as one who serves' (Lk 22:27). Jesus' path was one of service: the infant in the manger, the child lost in the Temple, the carpenter of Nazareth, the teacher sitting by the well at Sychar (cf. Jn 4:6), the master who washes the disciples' feet (cf. Jn

21. Cf. Os, February 3, p. 3.

22. Cf. Os, Feb. 10, p. 3.



13:5), the Son of Man who lays down his life for his friends (cf. Jn 15:13), who 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' (Phil 2:7). The Church encompasses with love all those who are afflicted with human weakness... She recognizes in the poor and the suffering, the likeness of her poor and suffering Founder...' (*Lumen Gentium*, 8)

The Church in India is a servant Church. She sees her poor and suffering Founder in the faces of all those, young and old, who are victims of poverty in any of its forms: hunger and malnutrition, unacceptable living conditions, disease, illiteracy, injustices at work and in society, the privation of fundamental freedoms, discrimination because of race, religion, sex, community or language. The Messianic Kingdom belongs to the poor and the suffering (cf. Lk 6:20). The signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God are the preaching of the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk. 4:19-19; Is 61:1-2). All these mean that the Church's service to the Kingdom of God is accomplished in the service of the poor and the suffering<sup>23</sup>.

## Evangelization

In a country like India where Christians are a small minority, where millions of people profess other faiths, there is no wonder the theme of evangelization obtained top priority in the Pope's mind. But the evangelization was never presented in the traditional way, as conversion and numerical growth of the Church, but as an encounter of the Gospel with cultures and human problems, as a loving service to peoples and nations, as a dialogue with religious and spiritual values. The essentials of evangelization were delineated in the Pope's description of the papal and episcopal ministries. He touched upon this theme on several occasions at different places. The more direct references may perhaps be found in the speeches he delivered in Vasai, Shillong and Madras. If Vasai presented a Christian community possessing great vitality, the fruit of the

23. Os, February 17, p. 8f. Cf. also section on 'Evangelization and Development' for more of similar ideas.

evangelization carried on by the Portuguese missionaries during the 16th and 17th centuries along the West Coast, Shillong represented modern tribal Christian communities who received the Gospel much later but reaped a plentiful harvest. Perhaps it was at Madras that the evangelization theme was developed with deeper theological insights.

The Mass said at the Marina Beach was in commemoration of St John de Britto or Arul Anandar (as he was known among the Tamil people), who was martyred in Tamil Nadu on 4 February 1693. It was just two days after the anniversary of his martyrdom that the Pope celebrated the Mass. This fact reminded him of all the missionaries who had spent themselves in the cause of evangelization of India. Of these St Thomas the Apostle obtains the first place, who was martyred near the city of Madras and whose tomb was in the city. St Francis Xavier was the second to be remembered. This great missionary of Asia was inspired with courage and strength at the tomb of St Thomas to extend his labours to Japan.

St Thomas, St Francis Xavier, St John de Britto and many others were great apostles who resembled very much the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his flock, the Son of Man who "came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). The disciples were transformed into ardent preachers of his Gospel by the experience of Jesus' resurrection. Thus evangelization is bearing witness to the cross of Christ and to the transforming power of the cross through resurrection.

Call to apostolate is common to all Christians; all are called for this through baptism and confirmation. All have to witness to the cross and its transforming power each within his/her special vocation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 34-36 and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2). Laymen have to fulfil this task "by their life and words at home, in their social group and in their professional circles". Their apostolate takes place in the "social and cultural framework of their homeland, according to their own national

traditions. Here the need of their being acquainted with the culture of the place and of promoting it, in accordance with the modern conditions, and perfecting it in Jesus Christ, so that faith of Christ and the life of the Church may no longer be extraneous to the society in which they live". The dialogue between faith and culture belongs in a special way to the laity, whose faith inspires their daily service to their fellow citizens and to their country<sup>24</sup>.

The spirit which hovered over the waters in the beginning (cf. Gen 1:2), of course, flows wherever it wills. But the Christians are aware that the Spirit anointed Jesus of Nazareth in order to give life in all its fullness. The same Spirit has anointed the Church to continue this mission of Jesus Christ. So she proclaims the Gospel to all who wish to listen and respond. So evangelization is not mere preaching or proclamation of Gospel but involves listening and response. Thus it becomes participation in a free dialogue<sup>25</sup>.

### **Evangelization and culture**

Evangelization is participation in the dialogue of revelation. In offering to others the Good News of Redemption, the Church strives to understand their culture. She seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. Once she knows and understands these various aspects of culture, then she can offer, respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of Redemption to all who freely wish to listen and respond.

Culture is the embodiment of the spiritual experiences and desires of a people. It refines and unfolds the spiritual and native qualities of each human group. It creates the customs and institutions which seek to render social

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24. Earlier the Pope had visited the basilica of St. Thomas in Madras and as "so many pilgrims before me have done", venerated the Apostle's tomb, which "speaks the history of the Church in this beloved land", cf. Os, Feb. 10, p. 15.

25. Homily in Madras on 5 February, 1986. Os, Feb. 10, p. 15f.

life more humane and more conducive to the common good. It gives concrete expression to truth, goodness and beauty in a multitude of artistic forms (cf. *GS*, 53ff). The culture of India, as it is witnessed to by Bengal, illustrates this. Here the human spirit has been nobly served by a host of men and women rightly esteemed for their learning and wisdom, for their sensitivity to the deepest aspirations of the human heart, for their precious artistic achievement<sup>26</sup>.

### **Inculturation**

It was in Calcutta the Pope made a direct reference to culture and inculturation, though earlier in Delhi he had talked about the duty of the bishops to promote inculturation. Calcutta was specially chosen because Bengal has the distinction of being a prominent representative of the 'venerable culture of this land'. Addressing the representatives of other faiths, the world of culture and academia, the Pope said that he was greeting in them "the spiritual vitality of Bengal and the whole of India". They "were heirs of more than three thousand years of intense artistic, cultural and religious life in this region"<sup>27</sup>. Another place he chose to speak on the topic was Shillong where people of the North Eastern Hills had gathered among whom the Gospel has entered "without doing violence to their culture or cultures"<sup>28</sup>. Celebrating Mass in Delhi against the 'backdrop of the Himalayan Mountains' provided another occasion to make an indirect reference to inculturation<sup>29</sup>.

On February 2 the Pope celebrated his second mass in the capital of India. It was the feast of 'the Presentation of the Lord'. In Psalm 24 which was chosen for the occasion the Pope found special inspiration in the words, "O gates, lift high your gates, grow higher ancient doors, let him enter, the King of Glory". Standing, as it were at the

26. Cf. Talk to representatives of the world of culture, of academia and other religions at St. Xavier's College, Calcutta on February 3: *Os*, Feb. 10, p. 13

27. *Ibid.* p. 9.

28. Cf. Homily at Golf Links, Shillong, on Feb. 4: *ibid.* p. 11.

29. Cf. Second Homily in Delhi: *Os*, Feb. 2, p. 3.



foot of the highest mountains of the world<sup>30</sup>, the Himalayas, 'the roof of the world', he was moved to address these words (originally addressed to the Temple of Jerusalem), to the temple that is the world. Stating that God is present in this world, and yet he wishes to draw nearer still, the Pope prayed: "So let the peaks of the Himalayan mountains... be lifted up at the Lord's coming... may the doors of very ancient culture whose cradle is this land open before the Lord."

The principle of inculturation is found in the fact that God is present in cultures, and desire to draw nearer. The cultures are to be opened up for the entry of Lord Jesus Christ into them. "God is present in the very heart of human cultures because he is present in man — in man who is created in his image and who is the architect of culture. God is present in the cultures of India. He has been present in all the people<sup>31</sup> who have contributed by their experience to the formulation of those values, customs, institutions and arts which comprise the cultural heritage of this ancient land. And the King of Glory wishes to enter into these cultures ever more deeply."<sup>32</sup>

In the homily of the Pope preached in Madras he said that for nearly two thousand years Gospel was in the process of being incarnate in the culture of India. He recalled what he had written (*Slavorum Apostoli*, 18) in commemoration of the Apostles of the Slaves, S.S. Cyril and Methodius: 'The Gospel does not lead to the impoverishment or extinction of those things which every individual, people and nation and every culture throughout history recognizes and brings into being as goodness, truth and beauty. On the contrary it strives to assimilate and develop all these

30. The mass was said for the delegations from the northern regions of India (Provinces of Delhi and Agra: Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and UP) and from Nepal.

31. The starting point for the development of the Greek Christian theologian was the idea of the presence of the Logos in the philosophy of the Greeks.

32. Os, Feb. 10, p. 3.

values: to live them by the mysterious and ennobling light of Revelation.'<sup>33</sup>

### Church and culture

As God is present in cultures and the Incarnate Word of God wishes to enter into the cultures, naturally the Church cannot but show to all cultures great esteem, and regard and take genuine interest in them. Whenever the Pope referred to the Indian culture this attitude of esteem and deep appreciation was quite evident. It is symbolic of the attitude of the Church towards all cultures. In Calcutta the Pope expressed before the representatives of other religions, academia and culture the Church's esteem for the manifold cultural life they represented, the Church's joy at the creative richness which has characterised the culture of India, "a marvellous continuity and a subtle unity in the midst of a wide variety of manifestations. Its vitality and relevance are borne out by the fact that it has moulded many sages and saintly mystics, poets and artists, philosophers and statesmen of great excellence. Yes, the Catholic Church looks in admiration upon your contribution to humanity and feels so close to you in so many expressions of your ethics and asceticism. She attests her profound respect for the spiritual vision of man that is expressed century after century through your culture and the education that transmits it. And she is pleased that, from the beginning, Christianity has become incarnate on Indian soil and in Indian hearts"<sup>34</sup>.

The Christian Churches have contributed to cultural development in India especially through their educational institutions<sup>35</sup>. It is the duty of Catholic educational institutions to show fidelity to the Indian culture, to receive it, to

33. *Os*, Feb. 10, p. 16.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

35. Education was one of the activities through which Christians promoted cultures. There were others, such as promotion of agriculture, journalism, participation in the renaissance and national movements, attempts by Christians to give shape to an Indian Christianity - attempts of K. M. Banerjee, K. C. Banerjee, Brahmabandab Upadhyaya, and many others in recent times.

be inspired by it to sharpen their vision and deepen their insight into religious truths. Catholics in every part of the world are bound, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions and in witness of Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good found among these people as well as in their social and cultural values. "Those who have received the message of the Gospel have a special duty to work for the inculturation of the Christian message" in their areas<sup>36</sup>.

Basing himself on the tenor of the discussions of the 1974 Synod of Bishops and the clear principles since then formulated by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical, *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, John Paul spoke to the bishops of India about the challenge of inculturation that is facing the Church everywhere, and in a special way in India. In Jesus Christ salvation is offered to all people. Though God's revelation took place in a specific culture, it was destined from the beginning for all cultures. It is the bounden duty of the Church not only to bring the Good News of salvation to all cultures but to present it to the genius of each people. This means that the Good News has to be translated into the legitimate variety of expressions of all the peoples of the world. 'The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world... have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of translating it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truths' (*Evangelium Nuntiandi*, 63). In this task the bishops of the local Churches have specific responsibility, to be exercised in close collaboration with the Holy See and in communion with the whole Church. Genuine and faithful adaptation involves discernment which should be the fruit of prayer, study and consultation, a discernment supported by pastoral charisms<sup>37</sup>.

36. Os, Feb. 10, pp. 13, 11.

37. Os, Feb. 10, p. 2,

This has been happening in India for two thousand years. One recent and perhaps more impressive example is what happened among some of the tribals. Talking in Shillong about Christianity in North East India, the Pope noted with great satisfaction that "in a real way the truth and values of the Gospel have taken root in the heart and imagination of the young people of these hills". The proclamation of the Gospel "continues and it is being lived out in every corner of this region in harmonious dialogue with local tradition". The Gospel has come here "not to dominate but to be at the service of every people". It has come "in order to be incarnated in your cultures without doing violence to them. In this process Christian tradition both enriches and is in turn enriched by this contact with many values that are preserved in the hearts of these peoples of the hills and plains". To the various problems that confront these people their own traditions and cultures have their answers. Building on these, the Gospel provides the best solution. Even in this region the task of inculturation ahead is immense. "In intimate communion with the universal Church, let your local Churches take to themselves, in a wonderful exchange, the perennial values contained in the wisdom, the customs and traditions of your peoples so that 'Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture' (*Ad Gentes*, 22).<sup>38</sup>"

### Evangelization and integral development

India being a developing country, the problems of development and its relation to humanism, religion and the Gospel were a major theme about which the Pope spoke on many occasions; perhaps in almost all his speeches in India he raised this topic. Evangelization is the proclamation of God's care for the whole man. Religion cannot divorce soul and body and be attentive only to the former. So too humanism is not what cares for the body of man but man as a whole. Integral development of man as a whole, of all men should be the concern of humanists, religious

38. *Ibid.*, p. 11. Cf. *Word and Worship*, 19 (1986), no. 3 article "Inculturation and Papal Visit to India" (p. 85ff).



men and Christians, especially of the leaders among them. Development may be described as the effort to adequately meet the needs of the whole man made up of body and soul, both temporal and spiritual. The effort implies a better ordering of the society, a transformation of the world, earthly progress so that man may live on this earth in peace, justice and contentment. Though the present world is a 'transient' one and man a pilgrim here, the will of God to transform the world and his transforming presence in the world should be of vital concern to all<sup>39</sup>.

We are all witness to the phenomenon of human suffering, of people living in need and poverty, facing injustice and threat to peace and security. Famine, disease, illiteracy, poverty of different kinds, injustice surround man and human society. Development is the effort and struggle to overcome these evils which condemn millions of people, and many peoples and nations remain on the margin of life. It is the concerted attempt for the liberation of people from the clutches of these evils that enables them to live a decent life in conformity with the dignity of a human person. "For individuals and families to effectively enjoy the degree of stability and freedom necessary for personal growth, certain minimum standards of living and working are absolutely required."<sup>40</sup> Integral human development can alone bring about a just society and that great, all pervasive good that is peace. Development is, as Pope Paul VI says, 'the new name for peace (*Populorum Progressio*, 87)<sup>41</sup>.

### Development needs a spiritual vision

A vision about the reality that is man, the full truth about man leads to the promotion of a whole programme for the integral development of man. That is why John

39. Cf. *Ibid*, "Liturgies during the Papal Visit" (p. 95ff).

40. Cf, Os, Feb. 10, p. 1f, Reference has already been made earlier to the responsibility of the pilgrim man towards culture and earthly progress.

41. Os, Feb. 17, p. 17.

Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (No. 4) wrote: 'Man is the way that the Catholic Church must take in order to be faithful to herself... man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission.' Man is the primary route that all humanity must follow — man in the full truth of his existence<sup>42</sup>.

With an emphasis on spiritual values the world is capable of formulating a new attitude towards itself — a spirit of fraternal charity and dedicated service, forgiveness, sacrifice and renunciation, remorse and penance for moral failings, patience and forbearance. The ancient land of India has preserved these values. This highly spiritual and moral vision perceives 'the birth of a new humanism in which man is defined above all by his responsibility towards his brothers and sisters and towards history' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 55). Development makes demands on man. It requires a radical openness to others, and people are more readily open to each other when they understand their own spiritual nature and that of their neighbour. Selfishness is a contradiction. By his nature man is called to open his heart, in love, to his neighbours, because he has been loved by God.

The Pope quoted with appreciation the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan on the need of a spiritual vision: 'Only a moral and spiritual revolution in the name of human dignity can place man above the idols of economic production, technological organization, racial discrimination and national egotism... The new world peace, freedom and safety for all can be achieved only by those who are moved by great spiritual ideals.' (*The Present Crisis of Faith*, Delhi, 1983, pp. 14, 104) <sup>43</sup>

Religion ought to provide such an integral spiritual vision of man. Religion is concerned with humanity and everything that belongs to humanity, and at the same time

42. *Os*, Feb. 10, p. 5.

43. Cf. Address to the Bishops of India: *Cr*, Feb. 2, p. 1. Talk to the leaders of culture etc., in Calcutta: *Ibid*, p. 5.

it directs to God all that is human within us. As religion works to promote the reign of God in this world, it helps the whole society to promote man's transcendent destiny. At the same time it teaches its members a deep personal concern for neighbour and civic responsibility for the community.

### Church's mission and development

The Church is quite aware of the intimate relation between humanism and development, the spiritual, religious vision of man and development, especially the relation between the Gospel and development. This has been brought out in several of its documents. It is this awareness which has moved the Church to devote herself to social action and developmental activities.

Evangelization is the proclamation of God's care for "the whole man made up of body and soul". If so "the will of God to transform the world" and his transforming presence in the world should be of vital concern to the Church and her shepherds; 'earthly progress is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 39). 'Between evangelization and human advancement — development and liberation — there are in fact profound links' (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 31). The "core of the Gospel is fraternal love springing from the love of God. The proclamation of the new commandment of love can never be separated from efforts to promote the integral advancement of man in justice and peace"<sup>44</sup>.

The Church has been clamouring for peace, justice and solidarity of all people. It prays constantly for the gift of a 'new spirit' that the heart of stone may be replaced by a 'heart of flesh'. She prays for the ethical, spiritual and fully human progress which is so necessary now when the human race has grown more numerous than ever before and is achieving scientific and technical progress never before known<sup>45</sup>.

44. To leaders of Culture and Religions in Delhi, Feb., 2, Feb. 10, p. 5.

45. To the bishops: Os, Feb. 10. p. 1.

The Christian tradition is very emphatic on the need to serve humanity. Jesus was sent to preach the Good News to the poor (cf Lk 4:8f). Evangelization is service. Love of God demands love of fellow men. 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us' (1 Jn 4:11). All men are children of God and calls him 'Our Father'. Again the Christian tradition is expressed in these words of St John: 'I ask you, how can God's love survive in a man who has enough of this world's goods yet closes his heart to his brother when he sees him in need' (1 Jn 3:1) <sup>46</sup>.

Pope Paul VI at the closing of Vatican II said on 7 December 1965: 'If ... in the face of every man, especially when this face is made transparent by his tears and suffering, we can and must recognize the face of Christ, ... and in the face of Christ we can and must recognize the face of our heavenly Father, ... then our humanism becomes Christianity and our Christianity becomes theocentric. And thus we can also say: to know God it is necessary to know man.' <sup>47</sup>

In India this Christian humanism, this messianic programme of Jesus of Nazareth, the programme of the Gospel has found expression in the various services of the Church such as medical care, social action, education etc. Various initiatives of Catholic agencies have served the needs of the Indian people and help to promote the developmental programmes of the nation. The Pope exhorted Catholic educators to make their institutions ever better instruments at the service of justice, development and harmony in social life. They should inspire an ever increasing awareness of the vocation to serve the integral well-being of people, especially the young and the poor.

The Pope made a special mention of the affirmation of the programme of the Gospel found in the action of

46. Homily in Bombay on Feb., 9; Os, Feb. 17, p. 12

47. To cultural and religious leaders, Delhi: Os, Feb. 10, p. 6.



Mother Teresa of Calcutta. It is an eloquent affirmation of the programme of Jesus, "and at the same time a witness..., a testimony which smites the conscience of the world... This type of evangelical service to the poorest of the poor fulfils in a concrete way the Messianic programme of Jesus... Such charity and self-sacrifice, done out of love of Christ, challenges the world which is all too familiar with selfishness and hedonism, with greed for money, prestige and power... this testimony proclaims not with words but by deeds and sacrifice the pre-eminent value of love". In the modern world there are various forms of poverty — besides physical poverty there is moral poverty of different kinds and different intensity. In this world the Church seeks to preach the Good News to the poor "through the efforts of Mother Teresa and others like her, whose love of Christ and service to the poorest of the poor is profoundly prophetic, profoundly evangelical"<sup>48</sup>.

### **Social conscientization and liberation**

The Pope did not directly speak anywhere either about social conscientization or about liberation as such. But development, the struggle for a better world, is understood as a process of liberation as sin and evil exist in the world<sup>49</sup>. It is also understood that conscientization of all classes of people regarding the realities of life is the effective means to liberation/development. Speaking at Trichur he said that "the role of religious bodies is above all to enlighten consciences regarding social rights and duties, and to ensure that human dignity and spiritual nature of human life and activity are everywhere recognized and promoted".

In the second homily preached in Delhi the Pope touched on the spiritual aspect of liberation and its implication for integral liberation. Poverty, hunger, every other suffering can be transformed by the Cross of Christ, the

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48. Homily in Madras, Feb., 6: Os, Feb. 10, p. 16.

49. Homily in Calcutta: Os, Feb. 10, p. 12f.

light of the world, light and hope of salvation. The Cross frees us from the slavery of sin and death. "This freedom, this liberation, is so fundamental from all other forms of slavery which are linked to the introduction of sin in the world." The spiritual liberation generated by the Cross of Christ creates such a condition in the hearts of men that it calls for a struggle against poverty, the sufferings of the poor.

All genuinely religious men, whether Christians or not, have understood this truth. Many men and women in India who prized the primacy of the spirit, like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, have emphasized it through words and deeds. They were engaged in efforts aimed at social liberation and integral development, advancement of the dignity and freedom of their brothers and sisters<sup>50</sup>.

### **Vaule and dignity of human work**

Sacrifices are linked to everything in human life; it is particularly linked to work. Work entails toil and fatigue; it can be hard, monotonous and exhausting, hazardous. But these painful aspects of work are accompanied by the joy of knowing the fact that to work is to collaborate with the Creator; work is participation in God's creative activity. Man's creation itself is a call from the Lord to transform the world. Work is man's answer to God's call to transform the world, to 'master' the world (cf. Gen 1:26-28; 3:16-19). As such work brings joy and fulfilment.

Work can be in a factory, an office or a hospital, or in the fields or as a rickshaw driver or as a mother at home. Whatever the work we do, we share in the creative activity of God. This gives all work its meaning and worth. 'The basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that

50. Just as Pope Paul VI (EN 31) coupled development and liberation, John Paul II also coupled them a few times. See, e.g., address to bishops: Os, Feb. 10, p. 1.

the one who is doing it is a person' (*Laborem Excerrens*, 6). Therefore all human work, however humble it may appear, must be fully respected, protected and justly remunerated. Unemployment and underemployment, just as lack of proper working conditions and inadequate remuneration degrade the dignity of man and depersonalize him and lead to a number of evils in the family and society.

The dignity and value of work should also be considered from the point of view of Christology and salvation. Jesus is the perfect model and inspiration for work. Remaining in deep communion with his heavenly Father he faithfully performed his daily work as a carpenter in his home. All his daily toil and fatigue were resumed in the great work of our salvation, which he performed through the Cross. The culmination was in his resurrection. The toil, the fatigue and the pain, all were thus transformed into 'new life'.

All human work, no matter how insignificant it may seem, shares in the work of salvation. 'By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity. He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn everyday in the activity that he is called upon to perform' (*Laborem Excerrens*, 27). The chosen ones of God must proclaim the wonderful works of God the Creator through everything that is the result and fruit of human work. Precisely for this reason we bring to the altar the fruits of human work and we offer them in sacrifice<sup>51</sup>. They are the spiritual sacrifices we are called upon to offer so that they become life for us in Jesus Christ, built as we are into a spiritual house in him (cf. 1 Pt 2:5)<sup>52</sup>.

### Meaning of suffering

The Nirmal Hriday of Mother Teresa at Kalighat pro-

51. The Pope's preaching during the Mass at Ranchi. Reference is to the tribal designs on the vestments the Pope wore on the occasion, the offerings the people brought to the altar.

52. Homily at Ranchi, Feb. 3: Os, Feb. 10, p. 6 f.

vided an occasion to the Pope to develop a few thoughts on the ever-present and omni-present reality of human suffering and reiterate some of the ideas he had expressed in the document, *Salvifici Doloris*. The 'unwritten book' of the history of humanity speaks constantly of the theme of suffering (*Salvifici Doloris*, 7). Individuals and groups and whole populations suffer when they see something in which they ought to share but which escapes them. Suffering is accompanied by a sense of fear and frustration. It becomes acute and intense when no adequate answer is forthcoming. Suffering is a challenge to the leaders in various fields, especially religious leaders to come together to usher in a new civilization which is struggling to be born, a civilization of love<sup>53</sup>.

One individual and one institution have heroically responded to this challenge in our day in India. They are Mother Teresa and her 'Nirmal Hriday'. Nirmal Hriday represents on the one hand the depth of human suffering, anguish, pain, abandonment, disease and death. On the other hand, it represents the courage and gentle spirit of educated souls to bring comfort, healing and hope to the abandoned, sick and dying. It bears witness to the primacy of love.

Human suffering is a mystery. The pain-filled body and spirit raise a number of questions: "Why? What is the purpose of suffering? Why must I die"? — questions which are not easily answered from reason, but are met by the mystery of faith and love, as it is the case in Nirmal Hriday. There the answer comes often in unspoken ways of kindness and compassion filled with sincerity and faith: 'I cannot fully answer your questions. I cannot take away all your pain. But of this I am sure: God loves you with an everlasting love. You are precious in his sight. In him I love you too. For in God we are truly brothers and sisters.'

Suffering gives men an occasion to put into practice the new commandment of Jesus in a heroic way: 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of these least of my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt 23:50). 'Our love is not

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53. Discourse in Calcutta: Os, Feb. 10, p. 3.



to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active' (1 Jn 3:18). "Nirmal Hriday proclaims the profound dignity of every human person. The loving care which is shown here bears witness to the truth that the worth of human being is not measured by usefulness or talents, by health or sickness, by age or creed or race." It comes from God in whose image we are all made. As in prosperity and happiness, so or even more, in privation and suffering we are always precious in the eyes of God. This is the message of Nirmal Hriday which should inspire in us real and active love<sup>54</sup>.

## Dialogue

To meet the challenges of the modern world and to pave the way for integral liberation and development, collaboration of all men is a must. "The Catholic Church has time and again expressed its conviction that all people, both believers and non-believers, must unite and collaborate in the task of bettering this world where all live together. 'This certainly cannot be done without a dialogue that is sincere and pure' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 21). Dialogue which proceeds from the 'internal drive of charity' (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*, 64) is a powerful means of collaboration between people in eradicating evil from human life and from the life of the community, in establishing right order in human society and thus contributing to the common good of all men in every walk of life<sup>55</sup>. Truth is what liberates and leads men on the path of genuine progress. And "dialogue is a means of seeking after truth and of sharing it with others.

The importance of dialogue, especially inter-religious dialogue, in a country like India where there are different religious traditions which are alive and active is obvious.

54. Talk at Nirmal Hriday, Feb. 3, Os, Feb. 2, p. 8.

55. To representatives of other religions in Madras on Feb. 5: Os, Feb. 10, p. 14.

About the need for dialogue among religions, cf. Discourse in Calcutta *Ibid*, p. 12 f; Discourse to religious leaders etc., in Delhi: Os, Feb. 10, p. 6.

It is an apostolic ministry closely linked to evangelization<sup>56</sup>. The Church urges all Christians to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral values among people of other faiths, as well as their social and cultural values (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2). He expressed his joy and happiness in meeting non-Christians and having spiritual fellowship with them. He reminded representatives of various religions gathered in Madras what he had written in his first encyclical: "The second Vatican Council's Declaration on non-Christians is filled with deep esteem for the great spiritual values, indeed for the primacy of the spiritual, which in the life of mankind finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole culture." (*Redemptor Hominis*, 11)

### Sainthood

"Truly extraordinary is this day in the history of the Church and of Christianity on the Indian soil", declared Pope John Paul at Kottayam on 8 February 1986. And it was on that day for the first time that the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St Peter, "had the joy of raising to the glory of the altar a son and a daughter of the Church in India, in their native land". Pope John Paul had in several places expressed his joy to be in India and his gratitude to God for the grace. But on that morning as he performed the ceremonial beatification of Fr Kuriakose Chavara and Sr Alphonsa, he appeared almost overcome with joy and gratitude. With great relish he repeated the thanksgiving prayer of Our Lord: "I thank thee Father... you have revealed them to the little ones". He appeared as if he had come to the complete fulfilment of his pilgrimage in the land of saints and sages through the celebration of sainthood.

Sainthood which is the end of human life on earth consists in that the saints are united with the Heart of the Divine Redeemer and are filled with love for all the sons and

<sup>56</sup>. Talk to bishops: Cs. Feb. 10, p. 1. Cf. also section: 'The India, Pope John Paul longed to visit'.

daughters of their blessed land. Saints are those whom God has chosen and loves in a special way, to whom he reveals the mysteries of his divine life. God's self-manifestation bears fruit in them. On 8 February 1986 the Church in India, the universal Church came to know that Fr. Kuriakose and Sr. Alphonsa were two such souls and in the beatification ceremony the Church celebrated that fact in joy and thanksgiving.

The source of sanctity is faith, intense charity, communion with Christ and dedicated love for the Church. The expression of sanctity takes various forms. His love of Christ filled Fr. Kuriakose with apostolic zeal and made him labour strenuously for the renewal and enrichment of Christian life; to give leadership or inspiration to a variety of apostolic initiatives; to dedicate himself to the cause of unity and harmony within the Church; to found religious communities and make religious vocation better understood and followed in this country.

Sr. Alphonsa's path to holiness was different; it was one of silent suffering through sickness and pain, both physical and spiritual. She came to love suffering because she loved Christ. The weight of suffering could not extinguish the joy of the Lord which filled the heart of this soul who took delight in ordinary and simple things. Her only desire was 'to suffer for love of God and rejoice in doing it'. She knew that by her sufferings she shared in the Church's apostolate. She seemed to have made her own the words of St Paul: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church." (Col 1:24)

"Truly great are the works of God!" (cf. Ps 92:4-5). "And the greatest work of God on earth is man. The glory of God is man fully alive with the life of God. The glory of God is the holiness of each person and of the whole Church<sup>57</sup>."

### Value of Religious life

On the occasion of the beatification of Kuriakose Chavara and Alphonsa, both of whom, each in his or her own way, bore witness to "the beauty and greatness of the religious vocation", the Pope touched upon the value of religious life as a specialized vocation and service in the Church. He elaborated on it at Fius X Seminary, Goregaon, Bombay, where he addressed the representatives of men and women religious of India, who number 50,000 sisters, 5,000 priests, 2,800 brothers working in India and some 1,500 working outside India.

Through baptism all are called to buy 'the pearl of great value' and acquire a 'treasure' with all that one has in life (cf. Mt 13:44-45), to be 'light' and 'salt' of the world. But some are specially called to follow Christ more closely and dedicate their life with a special consecration through the profession of chastity, poverty and obedience, to the service of Christ and the Church. Religious vocation is a special gift of God to the Church, and is a powerful manifestation of the Church's interior holiness and vitality. Through the religious the Church wishes to give to the believers and unbelievers alike, an increasingly clearer revelation of Christ. 'Through them Christ should be shown contemplating on the mountain, announcing God's kingdom to the multitude, healing the sick and the maimed, turning sinners to wholesome fruit, blessing children, doing good to all, and always obeying the will of the Father who sent him.' (*Lumen Gentium* 46) It is the vocation of religious to uphold the pilgrim dimension of Christian life (cf. Hb 13:14).

"The path of chastity, poverty and obedience, lovingly embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ.., is a path which remarkably accords with the spirituality of India's religious traditions where life on earth is itself understood as a 'path way' to a new freedom and fulfilment.' Religious life may take a contemplative form or an active apostolic form; it may resemble the great apostolic endeavours of Fr. Kuriakose, or assume the form of hidden suffering like that of Sr. Alphonsa. The contemplative form is held in high esteem in India which has



always given respect and importance to those chosen souls who witness to the absolute and transcendent reality of God through prayer and contemplation. The apostolic activities of the religious render a great service to India which is in the struggle for development; the poor, sick and needy millions in India look to the religious found in every corner of the country for solution to their suffering. It is a great satisfaction to the Church that the religious rise to the occasion and spend their lives in the daily care of Christ's brothers and sisters<sup>58</sup>.

### Papal and episcopal ministries

The Pope is, like any other Christian, a disciple of Jesus. True to the discipleship he came to India as a pilgrim in search of a new experience of his faith and its sharing with others at the shrine of India's cultural and religious values, and at the shrine of the People of God in this vast and great land. He came to India as an apostle to speak of the love of God; to proclaim the Gospel of love of that 'Good Shepherd', the beloved Son of God whom the Father sent to the world to manifest his love among us; to announce the love of God, the tender mercy of God. It is as an apostle of the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep and gave us life that the Pope wanted to speak to the Indian people<sup>59</sup>. As the pastor of the universal Church he came to give witness to the unity in love which the Church is, the *agape* of God, the communion in love of his children, the *agape* over which the Church of Rome presides<sup>60</sup>. He came to India to live that unity in love with the bishops of India, to spend "this hour of ecclesial communion... with oneness of our pastoral mission".

The image of the papal ministry presented by John Paul II through his attitude, gestures and words in India

58. Os, Feb. 17, p. 26 f. 14 f.

59. Talk to the bishops of India on 1 February at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Delhi: Os, February 10, p. 1.

60. St Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Church in Rome (Letter to the Romans, 52): "because you hold the presidency of love".

fully reflect the image the Second Vatican Council has drawn up. The bishops are called upon to keep a similar image in their ministry to the people of India, not to destroy but to build up, not to be served but to serve the poorest of the poor. The episcopal ministry in India is a call "to the apostolic task of bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ" among the people of India. It is evangelization — the bringing of the Good News to the poor, the proclamation of salvation, mercy and compassion of God in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 3:16). As messengers of God's love, the bishops are servants of mankind. This means initiation of the self-emptying of Jesus Christ who, though rich, became poor (cf. 2 Cor 8:9) and identified himself with the poverty of humanity in order to lift humanity up to himself.

### Priestly service

The Pope's main message to the Clergy was delivered in Goa at Bom Jesus where is kept the bodily remains of St. Francis Xavier, a marvellous example of personal holiness and of ardent zeal to share spiritual riches with the brothers and sisters among whom we live. Saintly Indian priests like Joseph Vaz, Angelo de Souza should inspire Indian priests with their self-sacrificing pastoral service. Blessed Kuriakose Chavara was a priest whose love for the Church inspired him to serve her in so many varied apostolates and motivated him to work tirelessly for the Church's unity and spiritual growth. The priests everywhere, particularly in India, are called to proclaim the Word of God. It is the heart of his vocation. It has a special significance to India where respect for the Word of God is shown by the great honour and veneration given to the sacred books, including the Bible. "The people of this great land of *gurus* and sages are people who, being deeply religious, go on seeking *gurus* who are truly men of God, men plunged in God, men who radiate the God-experience they have had." How eager, therefore, must the Catholic priests of India "be to drink from this fountain of life, which is Jesus himself"<sup>61</sup>.

61. Os, Feb. 17, p. 1f,

## Marriage and family

Pope John Paul spoke of marriage and family on three occasions at least. The close-knit family system in Kerala and among the Christians of Vasai prompted him to speak on family; marriage and responsible parenthood were taken up in his homily in Bombay. The essence of marriage is of course the mutual consent of the couple. Hence they are the ministers of the sacrament of matrimony. When a man and a woman approach the altar as ministers, the Church invokes the Holy Spirit to come down upon them. The Spirit brings about 'in the man and the woman a spousal change of heart — a change that will become a firm foundation of the marriage covenant'.

The home the spouses create is the outward framework of life in the family, of the inner mystery of their hearts. People not only live in homes; they also create homes. They create it by the fact of 'living' in each other's heart: the husband in the wife and the wife in the husband, the children in the parents and the parents in the children. The parental home is the mutual indwelling of human hearts. This fact reflects the mystery of the indwelling God in man (cf. Jn 14:23), the profound mystery of the relation between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:32 and 25 f)<sup>62</sup>.

## Conclusion

The announcement of the Good News to the poor, or evangelization in its finest and widest sense, was the main or even, one might say, the only theme of all the speeches of the Pope in India. Evangelization is the encounter of God's Kingdom with the realities of the world. In India it is the encounter with her cultures, religions and the struggle for an integral development of her teeming millions. The Church in India is called upon to face boldly the challenges involved in this task of evangelization, to project the genuine servant image of her founder Jesus Christ.

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<sup>62</sup>. Homily in Bombay on Feb., 9, Os, Feb., 17, p. 11 ff.

## The Papal Visit to India and Call to Unity

Pope John Paul II came to India "as a servant of unity and peace"<sup>1</sup> and the general theme of the papal visit: "The call of the Lord to Unity", seemed very relevant and extremely significant both for the church and the nation today. The evil forces that triumphed in the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Sant Longowal and many others in several parts of the country, in Punjab, Assam, Missoram, Gujarat and so on, seriously challenge the unity and integrity of India. With the independence in 1947 the great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Jayaprakash Narayan and others succeeded in making India a beautiful mosaic, well known for its unity in diversity. The people of different states, languages, cultures and castes were integrated into one strong nation on the basis of equality, fraternity, freedom and dignity of all men and women. But today India is being torn apart by the forces of communalism, casteism and religious fanaticism. The shape and beauty of the Indian mosaic appear to be marred and the small pieces of which it is made are falling apart. If the call to unity is timely in this Indian context, it is all the more so for the churches in India which are divided among themselves doctrinally, theologically, ideologically and even denominationally. Even in the case of the Roman Catholic Church well known for its institutional, monolithic unity, cracks are apparent as regards issues such as of freedom and equality of the Individual churches ("Rites"), inculturation and

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1. Pope's address on the occasion of the reception at the Delhi Airport; *L'Osservatore Romano* (hereafter CR) 3 Feb, 1986, p. 1.



indegenization, and theology of liberation.

Pope John Paul II in almost all his addresses in India called for unity, unity among the Catholic Churches, unity among the different christian Churches, unity among all the religions and unity among all men and women of good will. He repeated several times that he came as a pilgrim, as a servant of unity and peace. During the reception given at the Delhi Airport, the Pope assured the leaders of the Nation that "*the Church is always desirous of offering her loyal and generous contribution to the unity and brotherhood of the Nation, to the promotion of justice, love and peace and the authentic general progress of your country in many aspects of her life*"<sup>2</sup>. In his address to the Bishops at Delhi he said: "*I have come here in order to proclaim for the church in India the unity which Christ wills for all his followers - a unity modelled on the unity of life and love that exists in the Most Holy Trinity... As Pastor of the universal Church I must perform my own duty in the service of the Church's unity. For this reason I wish to support you in your responsibility as pastors of the local Churches.*"<sup>3</sup> Yes, in the person of John Paul II, we have rediscovered this concept and role of the papacy as a service to the unity of the Universal Church.

### **Pope, servant of unity**

God's revelation in the Old and the New Testaments is not so much about who or what God is, but about what man is and should be. God's call of Israel was a mission given to them to gather together all the nations and to extend salvation to the entire world. This call and promise to Israel was fulfilled in Jesus Christ in whom the whole humanity is called to be the People of God where there is "*no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female.*"<sup>4</sup> In Jesus Christ the destiny of humanity was finally revealed that they are *One People*,

2. OR, 3 Feb., 1986, p. 1.

3. OR, 10 Feb., 1986, p. 1.

4. Gal., 3:28

*One Body, the Body of Christ*, that they are all brothers and sisters, children of the *One Father*. Namely, God's purpose for humanity, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is the gathering of all peoples into *One Family* which has been inaugurated by the coming of the *Kingdom of God*. The Church, which is the community of Jesus' disciples, was called to proclaim the coming of this Kingdom and to give witness to it by its community life, *Koinonia*. In other words, the church was set in this world as a *sign of the Kingdom of God, a sign of the Unity of the whole humankind*. "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity."<sup>5</sup>

Have the Church's proclamation and claim to be the sign of the Kingdom of God, the sign of the coming unity of all humankind, any credibility today? If the Church itself is subjected to all sorts of divisions and conflicts, how can it be the sign of the unity of mankind? Unfortunately this is what has happened in the history of the Church. The One Church of Jesus Christ was divided into hundreds of denominations — Catholics, Nestorians, Monophysites, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Quakers, Salvation Army, Old Catholics, Pentecostals and many others. Each of them was further divided. What is wrong here is not the diversity of the Churches, but divisions or separations and condemnation of one another.

Diversity of Churches existed even during the Apostolic times. Churches in Palestine, Antioch, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus were all different in organization, administration, worship patterns, formulations of faith and Christian moral praxis, and they were living and functioning with autonomy. But in spite of these differences the Churches always maintained communion in a wonderful way, of course, not without tensions. Patriarchs and Bishops who were the heads

of the local churches were fully aware of the oneness of the church, of the universality of the Church of which the clear and highest expression was the early Ecumenical Councils. But gradually as the political, social and cultural divisions among the churches widened, theological and doctrinal differences were inflated which in its turn inhibited the unity of faith and communion among the different churches. It is in this context of increasing tensions and conflicts among the local churches that we have to trace historically and theologically the origins of papacy or the prime place of the Bishops of Rome.

As the number of local churches increased and as they became more and more diversified according to their political, social and cultural differences, there was a felt need and a spontaneous emergence of a visible sign of unity, a focal point in the communion of the churches, a servant and instrument of unity and communion of the universal church. It was the Bishops of Rome who began to exercise this service of unity. The authoritative apostolic tradition of Rome bequeathed by Peter and Paul was one of the sources for this Prime place of the church of Rome in the exercise of unity and communion. The political and cultural importance of Rome as the capital of the empire added to the power and prestige of the Bishops of Rome. From the third century onwards we see them starting to claim that they are the successors of Peter who was the chief of the Apostles. In the fifth century Bishop Leo I of Rome took upon himself the title, "Vicar of Peter" and taught that Christ gave authority directly to Peter and through Peter to the other apostles; similarly the Bishop of Rome, as the successor of Peter, has the fulness of authority and the authority of the other Bishops derives from the Bishop of Rome. But this teaching was always challenged by the Eastern Churches, though in fact they recognized the prime place of the Bishop of Rome, *primus inter pares*, "the first among equals". Whatever might have been the exaggerated claims of the Bishops of Rome and its negative reactions from the other churches it is a historical fact that during the first millennium the Bishop of

Rome made tremendous contribution to the unity and communion of the universal church. He was presiding over the communion of the churches and he became the visible sign of the Unity of the church.

Towards the end of the first millennium due to the influence of political and secular model of authority the *collegiality of the Bishops and ecclesiology of communion* of the early church were replaced by a *monarchical papacy and a pyramidal ecclesiology*. All authority in the Church was invested in the Pope who was at the apex of the pyramid so that Bishops became just his ambassadors and executives; the local churches became simply administrative units or parts of the Roman Church. Unity became uniformity with and conformity to the Roman Church. Communion was imposed by absolute papal authority and the demand of blind obedience. The result was the tragic divisions in the church in the second millennium; Rome's unnecessary interference in the affairs of the Eastern Churches and its spirit of imposition in the name of the "universal jurisdiction" of the Pope were reacted by the entire East and the great Orthodox Churches of the East separated themselves from the church of Rome in the eleventh century. In the sixteenth century protestant Reformation too it was the papacy which was under severe attack. Luther and the reformers accused the church of Rome that the papacy usurped the supreme place or the headship of Christ in the Church, that the Pope is thus the Anti-Christ. Thus, *paradoxically, the papal institution which was developed in the history of the Church, indeed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the cause of unity and communion of the churches became the very cause of disunity and divisions in the Church*. And it continues to do so as all the non-Catholic churches today without exception reject the catholic teaching of papal primacy and papal infallibility as defined by Vatican I.

Could the papacy become once again an efficient and credible sign of unity of the universal church, an effective instrument of communion among the local churches ?



Fresh hopes have been given and new light shed in the contemporary ecumenical discussions on the papacy. Most of the non-catholic churches today agree that papacy has a role to play in the universal church for the sake of its unity, universality and continuity, but the historical papacy as it exists and as exercised in the Roman Catholic church needs renewal and restructuring. Now, is the Roman Catholic Church ready to accept this challenge of renewing and restructuring the papacy and its practical functioning in the spirit of the Gospel and in the pattern of the early church? There are some indications that renewal has already been effected with Vatican II by the rediscovery of episcopal collegiality and the synodal structure. The image of papacy given by the recent Popes, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II, is quite different from that of Pius IX, Benedict XV, Pius XII, not to mention the dictatorial Popes of the medieval periods. Pope Paul VI kissed the feet of an Orthodox Patriarch from the East to manifest that papacy's function is service and not domination. The local churches are admonished to solve their problems themselves rather than turning to Rome for ready-made solutions. Thus there is every hope for the emergence of an ecumenical papacy, accepted by all the churches to be a sign and symbol of the unity and universality of the church, an effective instrument at the service of unity, love and reconciliation in the communion of the churches.

### **Call to unity in the Catholic Church in India**

The church in India is well known for its childish dependence on and blind obedience to Rome. The tragic consequence is that there is no real leadership in the church at the national and local levels. There is no imagination and creativity in the church in India, which paradoxically are the need of the hour as the church has to inculturate its faith and life in the Indian social, religious and cultural context. The Christian communities in India, especially in the North, appear to be the remnants of colonialism, pockets of western culture and extensions of the Roman church. Christian worship and prayers here continue

to be in the line of Latin or Syrian models and that in a country uniquely blessed with rich religious and spiritual traditions and symbols. Although Vatican II in many of its documents called for inculturation and indigenization of the church's faith, life and worship, the church in India is still divided on these issues. Attempts at theologizing in the Indian context is suspected here, and the Bishops cautiously keep a distance from the forums of theological discussions. Experimentation in Indian forms of worship is banned here. Many theologians and thinking christians are beginning to challenge this morbid situation of the church in India.

The Church is divided also on the issues of social commitment and liberation. In a country where about 300 million people are living below the poverty line, what should be the mission of the Church? Should the Church continue to serve the rich, the elite and the powerful through its net work of prestigious schools, colleges and hospitals concentrating all its resources and personnel for them? Or should the church concentrate on proclaiming the good news to the poorest of the poor in India? In the fishermen's struggle in Kerala led by some priests and religious, the official church and its leadership sided with the capitalists and the ruling party. While those who stood for the poor and the working class were branded as Marxists, communists or leftists.

A Third area of tension and conflict in the Catholic church in India is the "Rite" issue. The Catholic Church in India is a communion of three *Individual churches* — the Latin Church, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church, the last two being Oriental churches. As part of the colonial power, the Latin church had the upper hand and curtailed the rights and freedom of the ancient Oriental churches in India. In 1610 the whole India was divided into provinces of the Latin church, restricting the oriental churches to the tiny region of Kerala with the consequence that mission work in India has to be in the Latin Rite and missionaries from the oriental churches had

to change their Rite. Tensions and conflicts gradually mounted and the situation even today is not much different. Recently in 1982 the Catholic Bishops Conference of India at its Trichy meeting discussed this delicate problem of the inter-relationship of the three individual churches in India<sup>6</sup>. The Oriental churches demand that they should have the freedom to evangelize in any part of India and that it is their right and responsibility to see to the pastoral care of their emigrants in different parts of the country. The Latin Bishops plead that the jurisdiction of the Orientals should not be extended to other parts of India, as it would imply two or three Bishops in one place which would destroy the unity of the Catholic church and will lead to unnecessary competitions and rivalries among the individual churches. Discussions, controversies, memorandums and commissions have been abounding, but only creating more and more tensions, conflicts and animosities.

In this context of a weak and divided Catholic church Pope John Paul II made an appeal to unity, in his Delhi address to the Bishops, reminding them of Vatican II's teaching that the church is called to be a *sign of the unity of mankind*. So the church herself must live the mystery of unity in herself and there is *need for reconciliation* where unity has been impaired, damaged and broken. He called the local churches to reflect on this unity in all their internal relationships — among the bishops, the clergy, the religious and the laity — and to maintain communion among the local churches and communion with the Bishop of Rome which ensures the Catholicity of the Individual Churches<sup>7</sup>.

On the churches' social commitment too, the Pope was unambiguously positive. He stressed the need of bringing the Good News to the poor, of transforming the world in every aspect "so that it may be a worthy foreshadowing of the next", and of true development and liberation of

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6. See Jeevadhara No. 76, July 1983.

7. OR, 10 Feb., 1986, p. 2,

millions of human beings<sup>8</sup>. In several of his speeches he described evangelization as the proclamation of God's love and care for the whole man, made up of body and soul. Quoting from *Evangelium Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI, he said: "Between evangelization and human advancement — development and liberation — there are in fact profound links."<sup>9</sup> But the Pope seems to have failed to identify himself with the oppressed and struggling groups in India and to declare his solidarity with them. His programme did not include any meeting with such oppressed groups and action groups.

Although some people expected that the visit of the Holy Father would make an end to the complicated "Rite" problem in India, he touched on it only very briefly in his Delhi address to the Bishops. He called for *close communion and collaboration between the different rites* of the church. He mentioned the recent discussions and studies on the inter-ritual issues in India and promised that the final stage of this study will be carried out as soon as possible. Finally he declared: "Be assured that I shall do everything possible to ensure a *just and fair* settlement of the issue that will take into account all the *pastoral exigencies of unity and truth*. I have great confidence that the decision of the Holy See will be given full support by all the bishops"<sup>10</sup>. It is very unfortunate that the churches in India could not find a solution to this problem by mutual dialogue and that they are now waiting for a solution imposed from outside. Alas, once again the sign of childish dependence and lack of maturity of the Indian churches!

### Unity of all Christian churches

Pope John Paul's call to unity is addressed in a special way to the different christian churches in India which remain divided today. Of course, divisions in the

8. OR, 10 Feb., 1986, p. 1.

9. *Ibid*,

10. *Ibid*, p. 2.



Indian church happened, not because of any doctrinal or theological differences. They were imported to this country by the missionaries and the colonial powers. Hence it is all the more urgent and easy for the Indian churches to seek and find their unity. In addressing the Christian leaders of the church of north India at Calcutta, the Pope praised the initiatives and contributions of the Indian churches to the cause of christian unity<sup>11</sup>. It was in India that many episcopal and non-episcopal churches became united in forming the Church of South India and the Church of North India. Already in 1914 all the non-catholic churches in India had joined together to form the "National Council of Churches in India" as a forum for mutual dialogue, collaboration and common witness. After Vatican II the Catholic Church in India also took some initiatives and a few joint meetings and consultations were held between the Roman Catholic Church and the other churches represented in the National Council. The Roman Catholic Church is not yet a member of the National Council of Churches in India, and it is a sad fact that the ecumenical spirit of Vatican II has not yet penetrated it. Catholic ecumenism in India today is almost a dead thing.

Which is the way to unity? It is not a "return" of all the other churches to the Roman Catholic church, leaving behind their own traditions. It is a question of the communion of the "Sister Churches". Unity of the church is again not a return to the early undivided church. No, we cannot disown the development of 2000 years through which the Spirit revealed himself more and more and built the church, although the church might have gone wrong in certain things. Unity of the church, should be understood today as "foreward movement", a growth of all the churches into "catholicity", wholeness, where they give and take, enriching one another, where they discover the fulness of the Gospel, the fulness of Christ, the fulness of the Body of Christ. It means that all the churches have to open

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11. OR, 10 Feb., 1986, p. 8.

up to others with a willingness and readiness to learn, to change and to grow. If any church has gone astray from the path of the Gospel, from the essentials of the christian faith and praxis, it has to rediscover it. Once this rediscovery, this growth and this updating is made, the churches must confess together their same faith behind the diversity of its expressions. Today the ecumenical movement led by the World Council of Churches has undertaken this process of identifying the oneness of our faith in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* inspite of the different praxis and different expressions. On the world level the Catholic Church is also a partner in this process<sup>12</sup>. The way ahead of ecumenism is, therefore, the way of *mutual recognition of the churches*.

Some critics say that the catholic church of John Paul II is putting on the brake to slow down this process of mutual recognition. There may be some truth in it. Many of the speeches and statements made by John Paul II on ecumenical and controversial theological issues, such as papacy, priestly celibacy, ordination of women, sexual morality etc., reiterate strongly the traditional catholic positions without any consideration for the other churches. But on the other hand, John Paul II repeated several times that there is no question of going back from the doctrinal teachings of Vatican II on ecumenism, that the Church's commitment to ecumenism is "irrevocable", that the Roman Synod of 1985 was meant to give a "boost" to ecumenism which is "one of the pastoral priorities" to him. He also endorsed the council's way to unity, "unity in diversity", unity in faith and diversity in ecclesial traditions<sup>13</sup>.

In India Pope John Paul, in his meetings with the non-Catholic leaders and in his homily at Goa, reiterated the

12. *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper, No. III Geneva: WCC, 1982.*

13. *Information Service, The Secretariat for promoting christian Unity Vatican City, December 1985.*

Catholic church's commitment to ecumenism and called for *collaboration, theological dialogue, common witness*, and above all *fervent prayer and change of heart*: "I pray that all christians of India may be stirred by the Holy Spirit of God to work for the cause of Unity with generosity and wisdom."<sup>14</sup> The Pope stressed the unity of all christians in Baptism where they are made into one Body by the Spirit and called for the fuller realization of this fundamental unity. He said: "The past and present divisions are a scandal to non-christians, a glaring contradiction of the will of Christ, a serious obstacle to the church's efforts to proclaim the Gospel."<sup>15</sup> He spoke about the tremendous ecumenical progress we have achieved today and called upon the churches to continue on the path to full unity. In his separate meetings with the heads of the Jacobite church and the Syrian Orthodox church, the Pope asked for closer collaboration and unity and stressed the importance of local ecumenism and unity at the local level.

It is true that the unity of the churches cannot be achieved by the appeal of the Pope or of the World Council of Churches, not even by a declaration on the universal level; it can be achieved only by starting the process of mutual recognition at the local level, at the grass-root level. Has the Pope inspired the local churches in India? We have to wait and see. The fact that there was no major ecumenical meeting of all the leaders of the churches with the Pope, but only separate meetings with the leaders of some churches, sufficiently indicates the cool climate of ecumenism in India today.

### Unity of all mankind

As the Church is the sign of the unity of all mankind, call to the unity of the churches is ultimately that of all mankind. The reality to which the church

14. OR, 10 Feb., 1986, p. 8; also p. 16 ff, and 17 Feb., pp. 5, 7, 8.

15. See Pope's Homily at Goa, OR, 10 Feb., 1986. p. 17.



points to is the unity of all mankind which is the task and mission of the church. To be a credible sign of it, the church has to promote it by all means. This is possible today only through dialogue, dialogue with the world, with all peoples and cultures, with all religions and ideologies. As the church has the mission of unifying the whole family, all other religions too have the same role to play. All religions teach the fatherhood and/or motherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity and profess that on this strong basis they are committed to the unity and unification of all. As India is the cradle of many living religions and unique in the sense that here people of different faiths live side by side with tolerance, understanding, mutual respect and collaboration, the church in India has the privilege and responsible task to initiate and develop inter-religious dialogues and thus to tread new paths towards the unity of all mankind.

With the Second Vatican Council there has been tremendous change in the understanding and approach to the other religions. When the church had the *first encounter* with the living religions, they were considered a threat and danger to its own existence. The first missionary approach was therefore one of total rejection and condemnation. The other religions were seen as devil's work, magic and human endeavour or man's arrogance to reach God. The *second encounter* occurred in the context of the development of human sciences. Sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and similar other disciplines scientifically studied religions and brought to light the immense human values and truths contained in them. Vatican II officially recognized and acknowledged the spiritual and moral values and elements of truth contained in all the religions. Today, it seems that the Church is having a *third encounter* with other religions. They are being considered to be possessing their own roles in God's plan of salvation. Hence the church has to enter into serious and loving dialogue with them to understand the fulness of God's revelation and to prepare the way for the realization of the Kingdom of God. The call of Jesus is not to destroy the



other religions but to open up their boundaries and to build bridges between them. A religion has to grow not by conquering and destroying the other religions, but by meeting them in friendly, loving and open dialogue and thus by being enriched by them. The significance of Pope John Paul's call for inter-religious dialogue and unity of all mankind should be understood from this new theological perspective.

The Pope began his visit in India with his brief address at the Delhi Airport during the welcome given to him by the Indian Government. There he said: "As I begin, I take this occasion to express my *sincere interest in all the religions of India* — an interest marked by genuine respect, by attention to what we have in common, by a desire to promote inter-religious dialogue and fruitful collaboration between people of different faiths"<sup>16</sup>. At Calcutta at the meeting with the religious and cultural leaders, the Pope pointed out that "India's greatest contribution to the world can be to offer it a spiritual vision of man"<sup>17</sup>. At Madras in his meeting with the non-christian representatives the Pope declared: "The Catholic church recognizes the truths that are contained in the religious traditions of India. *This recognition makes true dialogue possible.*" He stressed the tremendous need for and prospects of interreligious dialogue in India. It would lead to mutual discovery and growth, to sharing with one another the truths they have discovered, and thus to help one another in the search for truth. It is letting God be present in our midst. Dialogue and collaboration of all religions is indispensable to "the task of bettering this world where we all live together", and to the integral liberation and development of millions of our fellowmen. All religions have to collaborate in "the struggle to eliminate hunger, poverty, ignorance, persecution, discrimination and every form of enslavement of the human spirit"<sup>18</sup>. The final fruit of this

16. OR, 3 Feb., 1986, p. 1.

17. OR, 10 Feb., 1986, p. 5.

18. *Ibid*, p. 6.

dialogue among religions, according to the Pope, is the fellowship of all people, the unity of all mankind and our communion with God who is the source and revealer of all truth.

Pope John Paul's call to unity in India was powerful, passionate and touching, and he ably projected the image of a servant of peace and unity. Its power comes not so much from the personal charism of the Pope, but from the Lord's call which he faithfully and ardently proclaimed wherever and whenever he could. What would be the response of the Catholic Church, the Christian Churches, all the religions and of the Nation as a whole to this sincere and ardent call to Unity?

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